

Practical Discourses
On Several
SUBJECTS.

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VOL. III.



L O N D O N:

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THE BRITISH MUSEUM

TO THE
RIGHT HONORABLE

ROBERT

EARL OF OXFORD,



EARL OF OXFORD,

Knight of the Most Noble Order of
the Garter

My Lord

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 14th inst. and in reply to inform you that the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities for their consideration.

TO THE
 RIGHT HONOURABLE
ROBERT,
 Earl of *OXFORD,*
 AND
 Earl *MORTIMER,*
 Knight of the Most Noble Order of
 the GARTER.

My Lord,

IN *Addresses of this Nature all Writers profess a great Regard for Truth; but there are few who keep to the strict Measures of it. The*

iv DEDICATION.

Incense, wherewith they affect to come before their Patrons, being generally too strong, and sometimes to a Degree very offensive. Without pretending an Exemption from so common a Fault, which would only serve to bring me under greater Suspicion of it; I shall, My Lord, on this, and with the Blessing of God, on all other Occasions, determine my self by the following Rule; That we are faithfully to consult our own Reason and Conscience in whatever we do, without respect to the unjust Prejudices or Passions of other Men.

This Rule, My Lord, is the only true and genuine Spring of Satisfaction to us in the lower Circumstances of Life; But it is, if possible, of greater Importance still to Persons in publick and eminent Stations; To such of them especially, who have been intrusted with the chief Direction of Affairs:
As

DEDICATION. V

As the Reasons, upon which they proceed, are not only more unknown, and remote from common Notice, but ought on many obvious Accounts to be so.

And yet, My Lord, tho' in Matters of State, there are a thousand Incidents, which render it difficult for the ablest Ministers to conduct themselves, how frequently do the weakest and most incompetent Judges of those Measures they are oblig'd to take, assume a Right of animadverting upon ^{it}? So that Politicks it may be said, are become the ordinary Topicks of Discourse in a manner to all Men, but Politicians.

Be pleas'd, My Lord, to pardon me for having mention'd a Subject so foreign to my Province. It will be much more proper for me to acquaint Your Lordship with the Motives upon which I was induc'd to prefix Your Name to these Discourses.

vi DEDICATION.

That Your Lordship is an able Judge in all the more elegant and useful Parts of Learning, will be readily acknowledg'd : But it is the Happiness of those, who have the Honour of enjoying Your Lordship's most improving, and withal most free and easy Conversation, to observe, that Your Abilities, to judge of whatever comes before You, are not superior to Your Candour and Goodness in the Judgments You make.

Your Lordship's favourable Opinion of the Two preceding Volumes is a signal Instance hereof; and for which I cannot here omit to pay my very humble Acknowledgements. You were pleas'd, My Lord, to place the many Defects that occur'd in them, to the Account of those unhappy and disadvantageous Circumstances, under which they were compos'd. But how, My Lord, shall I account for it my self, that after several Noble Instances of Your Liberality

DEDICATION. vii

lity towards retrieving my Fortunes, I have not been able to discover more sensible and worthy Effects of it, in what I have now the Honour of presenting You?

Yet I am not so vain, My Lord, as to ascribe those Favours to my particular Merit, which are owing to a general Inclination of Your Lordship to Acts of Munificence, and the Encouragement You are found on all Occasions so readily dispos'd to give, towards the Advancement of Knowledge in any Kind, that may be of any real Use to the World.

It is from this generous Principle, that after a long and curious Search, and with unbounded Expence, Your Lordship has amass'd together, one of the most valuable and choice Collections of Records, and other learned Monuments of Antiquity, which this Nati-

viii DEDICATION.

*on, or the Age can produce: But where-
of Your Lordship is so perfect a Ma-
ster, as if You had liv'd in the sever-
al Ages wherein they were penn'd, and
convers'd with the several Authors of
them.*

*It is, My Lord, real Matter of Sur-
prize, that a Gentleman early habitua-
ted to Business and an active Life, and
who by just Degrees, according to a
wise Maxim of the Venetian Govern-
ment, pass'd thro' the several and pre-
vious Posts of State, till by a Superi-
ority of Genius, he arriv'd at length to
the Highest, could yet find Leisure for
improving himself, to so eminent a De-
gree, in every kind of human and polite
Literature. But it has been on many
Occasions no less admir'd, that even
amidst the most arduous and nice Emer-
gencies of State, Your Lordship, at pro-
per Intervals, has been so perfectly able
to disengage Your Thoughts, and turn
them*

DEDICATION. ix

them upon the common entertaining Subjects of Conversation. An equal Argument of the Strength, and the Liberty of Your Lordship's Mind !

A Person of ordinary Talents has the whole Capacity of his Soul soon taken up; and the want of Extent in it often betrays him into Amusements, which appear in Company very foreign, and sometimes indecent and disgusting; while Men of a large and open Understanding can more easily take in different Objects, and sort them after a more distinct Manner.—Where Nature designs a great Man, her principal Work is to form him for doing all Things that are great, difficult and extraordinary, with an uncommon Facility.

My Lord,

*It may be expected, that in Compliance with the common Forms observ'd on the like Occasion, I should set before
the*

X DEDICATION.

the World, in the best Light I am able, the several Qualities, wherein Your Lordship excels; and especially, not to mention Your other domestick Vertues, Those, which in Your conjugal and paternal Relation, have been exemplify'd after so very remarkable a manner; and in the Dutiful Returns whereof Your Lordship has ever been as remarkably happy.

But I shall barely presume, My Lord, to say something more particularly concerning one great Quality, wherein Your Lordship has no Superior, that has with Reason ever been esteem'd among the highest Perfections of human Nature, and which adds indeed a Dignity and Lustre to all the rest. I intend, My Lord, that Fortitude, which discovers it self in enabling us, if I may use a popular, but abusive way of Speaking, to bear the Smiles and the Frowns of Fortune, with equal Temper.

In

DEDICATION. XI

In both these Respects Your Lordship's Favourite Maxim seems to be the same with that of Your Favourite Poet,

*Laudo manentem, si celeres quatit
Pennas, resigno que dedit, & mea
Virtute me involvo.*

In all the Incidents of Your Lordship's Life, the same Steadiness, the same Complacency of Temper has always appear'd. You have been, My Lord, no less easy and condescending in the first Posts of Credit and Honour, than compos'd under Circumstances of greater Difficulty or Danger. The Attack which was made in so violent a manner upon Your Life, and which will be mention'd in Histories, of much longer Duration, than any thing I can propose to Publish, was receiv'd by Your Lordship with less Concern, than it was resented by the Noble Persons about
You.

xii DEDICATION.

You. It was a much more sensible Wound, which Your Lordship felt upon the Death of that most excellent and accomplish'd Lady, the late Marchioness of Caermarthen. But even that was sustain'd with all the Resignation to Providence, which a Debt owing to Nature from the most tender and afflicted Father would allow.

My Lord,

I do not say these Things out of a false Complaisance to Your Lordship. Nothing can be more opposite to the Temper I have mention'd, and wherein true Greatness of Mind consists, than the little Artifices of Insinnation, by such a Method. What appears more bright and extraordinary in Persons of superour Condition, ought notwithstanding to be observ'd for the common Benefit of Mankind; and as we may take occasion thereby of making many improving and moral Reflections. Were Dedications

DEDICATION. xiii

dications always to be form'd upon this View, they would no longer lye under the great Discredit, which they generally, and indeed the most part deservedly do.

My Lord,

I have chiefly mention'd some of those generous Qualifications as entring into the Distinction of Your Character, which are the proper Ornaments of private Life. It falls not within my Sphere to say any thing with Respect to the high Part You have acted, in the Administration of Publick Affairs; neither shall I take upon me to enumerate the several Honours done You by our late excellent Sovereign, in regard to Your personal Merit, and to a long Series of Ancestors of Your own Name, who have been distinguish'd by the most illustrious Alliances in the Kingdom.

I shall

xiv DEDICATION.

I shall only, My Lord, beg leave to add, that besides the invincible Motives of Gratitude to this Address, it is a Debt more particularly incumbent on me, as I have the Honour to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's

most humble,

most obedient

Servant and Chaplain,

28 SEP 60

R. Fiddes.

T H E

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SER-

SERMON I.

The Duties of Christian Conversation, as it respects the Government of the Tongue.

PHIL. i. 27.

Only let your Conversation be as becometh the Gospel of Christ.

IT would render a Discourse on these Words too diffuse, to Treat of Christian Conversation in the large Sense here intended by the Apostle, with regard to the Duties of *Social Life* in general. I shall therefore wholly apply my self to the Consideration of it, in a more restrain'd Sense, as in discharge of the Duties we owe to Society, as it respects the Government of the *Tongue*; and here I shall consider, what is incumbent on us, under these three following Heads, taken from the Inspir'd Writings,

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I. Of a *Good*, *James* iij. 13.

II. Of an *Honest*, *1 Pet.* ij. 12. And,

III. Of a *Holy Conversation*, *1 Pet.* i. 15.

First, By a good Conversation I would, in the lowest Sense, be thought to intend a manner of Corresponding with other People, whereby we give no reasonable Cause of Offence, how remote soever it may appear. This indeed is a Duty incumbent on us, as we would be suppos'd to understand the Laws of common Decency: Persons, who do not discover by their Conduct, that Religion has any great Power over them; yet, out of meer regard to their Interest, to their Reputation or Ease, or a Desire of being thought Agreeable, will think themselves concern'd to avoid all provoking and offensive Language. Perhaps the World, the politer Part of it especially, was never more Cautious in Conversation of preserving the Appearances at least of good Temper, and except where they are acted by Party-Regards (which break in upon all Rules) of guarding against every thing, that may be justly interpreted an Insult upon those, with whom they converse.

Mildness, especially in conjunction with other Social Qualities has great Advantages, consider'd purely as a *human* Virtue. Nothing tends more to gain upon the Affections of Men, and open an Access to their Hearts; and by this means to gratify the invincible Inclination, which almost every Man has, of being belov'd by every Body.

Vanity is the most general Character of Mankind; but principally affects to discover itself in Company and publick Assemblies. Now by
being

being strictly cautious not to offend those we accompany with, and putting on an Air of Submission in their Presence, tho' our Equals, we give them to understand, that they possess an advantageous Post in our Minds; or we are interpreted perhaps to ascribe to them, what cannot fail of being acceptable, a kind of Superiority over us.

Mildness is also a proper Quality to gratify our own Passion for Esteem and Applause. For it tends to make those, among whom our Conversation lies, sensible, That if we are not naturally of a good Temper, yet (which may be consider'd as an Argument both of our Piety and Prudence) we have gain'd Strength of Mind sufficient to Master, and Correct a bad One.

In the way of Argument, where we happen in Conversation to fall upon it; nothing is of greater Service than to forbear all rash and intemperate Language, and to avoid every Occasion that may provoke us to it; for we never gain so absolute an Ascendant over the Tempers of other Men, as when we are perfectly able to command our Own.

But tho' human Motives, in Persons who have had any Advantages of Education, will go a great way towards regulating the Tongue, with regard to the Duty I am recommending; we shall however do well to strengthen those Motives, by Arguments drawn from the Genius and Precepts of our Holy Religion.

Mildness and *Humility*, Qualities inseparable, and above all others opposite to an arrogant and assuming Air in Conversation, are not to be consider'd merely as Ornaments of Civil Life, but as Graces of the Christian.

losophy ever explain'd the Nature of these Duties so well, or carry'd the Notion of them so high, as the Gospel of Christ; much less was the Practice of them ever recommended, after so powerful and persuasive a Manner, as by the Rules of it.

Indeed the generality of the Philosophers, never talk'd more like *Heathens*, than upon these two Branches of natural Religion: if after all they really consider'd them as proper Branches of it. To shew us, how imperfect at best their Notions concerning *Humility* were, they had, strictly speaking, no Name for it. The Word which we render *Humility* from them, in the common Acceptation of it, signify'd Meanness and degeneracy of Mind; and very often that whereby they us'd to express, *Mildness*, had no better a Signification.

Notwithstanding the Principles of Christianity are very clear on both these Heads, it may be question'd whether they be not Christians, who run into the same Errors with the Heathens concerning them; and who imagine on the one Hand, That as a haughty and commanding Air of Conversation, is an Argument of Magnanimity, or what vulgar Minds at least, who are so numerous a Party, may be induc'd to think the Effect of it; so on the other Hand for a Man to be always of a condescending and submissive Temper, which never permits him to strike out into any daring or *formidable* Language, is a sign that he either really wants Spirit, or what however will very probably render him suspected for want of it to the World. I shall not take upon me to shew particularly how unjustly both these Prejudices are grounded, but content my
self

self with observing, That great Minds, as they are most cautious of giving Provocation, are always most difficultly Provok'd; and that the Calm and Sedate has even been reputed, and with great Reason, the truest Courage.

It is nevertheless but a low Character of good Conversation, that it is *Gentle* and Inoffensive. Goodness imports an Inclination to good and generous Offices, whenever proper Occasions of doing them are presented. *Every good Tree*, says our blessed Saviour, *bringeth forth good Fruit*, Mat. vij. 17. He employs the same Word with the Apostle, *James* iij. 13. in recommending a good Conversation, and particularly as it concerns the Management of the Tongue: For so he explains himself more at large, *Luke* vj. 44, 45. *For every Tree is known by his own Fruit: For of Thorns Men do not gather Figs, nor of a Bramble Bush gather they Grapes. A good Man out of the good Treasure of his Heart bringeth forth that which is Good: And an evil Man, out of the evil Treasure of his Heart, bringeth forth that which is Evil. For out of the Abundance of the Heart, the Mouth speaketh.*

A good Man then, will make it the great End of his Conversation to promote, as much as in him lies, the Good and Advantage of all Men. But because we can never give so clear and distinct Notions of any Duty by general Maxims, as by reducing what we say, to particular Rules of Life: I shall observe to you, the good and proper Offices of the Tongue in Conversation as reducible to the four Rules following.

1. Of speaking Well and Advantageously of other People.

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2. Of

2. Of judging Candidly concerning their Failings or Escapes.

3. Of imparting to them useful and wholesome Instructions : And,

4. Of reproving them for their Faults.

I do not say all the good Offices of Conversation, as they respect the Good or Benefit of other Men, are comprehended under these Particulars. But yet they are of such Influence and Extent, that if we could be persuaded to the sincere Practice of them, it would dispose us to a much greater Facility of Practising all the rest.

1. A good Man will think himself concern'd, to speak Well and Advantageously of other People. This is what a Sense of Humanity, and on most Occasions of Prudence and good Manners, will oblige him to: But Christian Charity lays upon us still superior and invincible Motives to an Office so *Human* and Becoming in itself: That *Charity*, I say, which is the Sovereign and Vital Principle of the Duties we owe to Society; and which disposes, or rather constrains us to do all the Good we possibly can, to all Men. But how frequently does it happen, that we have no way of being so Useful or Beneficial to those, we love, as by embracing the proper Occasions of speaking in their Favour, or disabusing others who have taken up any unjust Prejudices against them; we may be render'd incapable by the Circumstances of Life, God has plac'd us in, of giving other Proofs of our Charity and Benevolence to Mankind; but this is an Act of *Generosity* which almost every Man has frequent Opportunities of performing, and every good Man will

will certtinely think himself under an indispenfible Obligation to perform.

I would not hereby be thought to recommend that falfe Complaisance, which fometimes inclines us to beftow our Incenfe on thofe, for whom we have a Regard, with too liberal a Hand. *Flattery* is always an Argument of a *Mean*, and for the moft Part of a *Mercenary Spirit*. Yet as there are few Men fo Perfect, in whom we do not meet with Occafions now and then of obferving fomething Wrong; there are few on the other Hand, who with all their Defects, have not fome good and ufeful Qualities, which may give us reasonable Grounds for a moft Commendation.

There is one way indeed of commending other People, which is but a more artful and fpecious Method of traducing them; and that is, when after we have faid feveral Things to their Advantage, and perhaps run out in their Praise to an immoderate Length, we fuddenly recollect our felves, and turn upon them with fome grievous and ftinging Reflection. *Solomon* elegantly expreffes fuch kind of Commendations by *the deceitful Kiffes of an Enemy*, who never Strikes more Secure, or Wounds fo Deep, as under the Overtures and Difguife of Friendship, *Prov. xxvij. 6.*

2. We are to judge Candidly of the Failings and Escapes of other Men. The Apoftle makes it one principal Character of Charity, that it *hopeth all Things, believeth all Things*; that is, all Things, wherein there is room for us to make candid and favourable Judgments. Suppofing, for Instance, there be any real Foundation, for what we hear another Perfon charg'd or re-

proach'd with, Charity will represent in his Behalf; *That*, nothing has befall'n him, but what is common to Man; *That*, he has the same Passions with other Men; or was at the time of his being Overcome, under more dangerous and violent Circumstances of Temptation. We think it reasonable the like Alleviations should be admitted in Excuse of our own Follies or Vices; and certainly we should think it equally reasonable to admit them in our Judging or Speaking of other Men, were we to govern our selves not by the corrupt Insinuations of Self-Love, but the known Maxims of Christian Charity. Nay, Charity will suppose several mitigating Circumstances in the Case of other Delinquents, which cannot be suppos'd in our own. Because we judge of those Criminal Actions whereof we have our selves been guilty, by Evidence and *Self-Consciousness*, and know how they have been in all respects circumstantiated; but we see the Conduct of other Men only in exterior Appearance, without knowing the secret Motives of it; and what we do not see or know to their Disadvantage, we ought not in Charity to presume. But if we have been so happy, as wholly to escape those Snares, other Persons have been observ'd to fall into, it will however be an excellent Rule, considering the Frailty of human Nature, to restrain us from all uncharitable and rash Censure of them, that we should *consider our selves, lest we also be tempted*, Gal. vj. 1.

3. It is a further Character of good Conversation, to impart good and wholesome Instruction, and especially in what relates to the great Duties or Principles of Religion. No
that

that religious Subjects are at all Times, and in all Places, proper to be treated of in private Conversation: Religion is a grave and serious Thing, and ought not to mingle with every trifling and empty Affair; It is Holy, and demands too great Reverence to be introduced in common with vulgar and prophane Discourse. Yet this we may do without exposing the Honour and Dignity of it: Whenever any Error of ill Consequence to the Faith or good Manners is advanc'd in Conversation, we may take the Occasion of refuting it; or where we find any ignorant Person in a good and serious Disposition to receive Instruction, we should endeavour by proper Arguments to bring him to the Acknowledgment of the Truth. Besides that there are Seasons, and especially in the Society of grave and prudent Persons, wherein it may not only be convenient, but highly requisite, professedly to make some important Article of Religion or Morality, the Subject of Discourse. And to this End are the Commands in Scripture; That we should *consider one another to provoke to Love, and good Works; not forsaking the assembling our selves together, but exhorting one another*, Heb. x. 34. That, *No Man seek his own, but every one his Brother's Good to Edification*, Phil. ii. 4. And that, *as every Man hath received the Gift, even so we should minister the same one to another, as good Stewards of the manifold Grace of God*, 1 Pet. iv. 10.

4. Where proper Occasions offer, we are to admonish Men in a friendly and decent Manner of their Faults. There is perhaps no Duty of Religion which requires greater Caution or Prudence in the Discharge of it, than this of fraternal

ternal Reproof; St. Paul speaks it as a particular Commendation of the *Romans*, that they were *able* to admonish one another; and makes it an Argument very pertinent to that, I am upon, of their being full of *Goodness* as well as Knowledge, *Rom. xviii. 14.* Indeed the greatest Abilities are requir'd to qualify us for so nice and ungrateful an Office; but which yet becomes on many Occasions indispensably necessary. Tho' as we generally desire nothing more than to render our selves acceptable to those with whom we converse, we are very difficultly persuaded to a Duty, which so visibly exposes us to the Hazard of displeasing: We ought not however to plead Difficulties in bar of what the Honour and Interest of Religion may require of us. And yet after all, there is not perhaps so great Danger of giving Offence by a modest and seasonable Reproof, as the Backwardness of Men for other Reasons to this Duty is apt to heighten their Apprehensions of. *Solomon*, who certainly understood Human Nature very well, and form'd the admirable Rules he has left us, upon his Knowledge of it, lays it down as a Maxim. That, *He, who rebuketh, shall afterwards find more Favour, than he who flattereth with the Tongue, Prov. xxviii. 23.*

Secondly, I proceed to consider what is incumbent on us, with respect to an *honest*, or as *Holy David* expresses it, an *upright* Conversation. And here I shall take occasion to speak of a Duty, which tho' expressly enjoyn'd in the Holy Scriptures, and in a peculiar manner agreeable to the Nature and Genius of our Holy Religion, yet is far from being so generally practis'd, as might be expected, in Christian Conversation.

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versation. I mean the great Duty of *Sincerity*, so far as it relates to our Words, whether Affirmative or Promissory.

Few Persons indeed have the Effrontery to affirm what is directly false, what they know to be so, and may easily be detected in. For the worst of Men desire to preserve some kind of Reputation in the World, but, they observe, there is no Character more infamous or contemptible, than that of a Lyar. They are cautious therefore how they assert Things which have no real or probable Foundation, not out of regard to Truth, consider'd as a moral Virtue, but as an Ornament of Civil Life: Yet there are so many Ways of misrepresenting Facts really true in themselves; of amplifying or suppressing the Circumstances wherewith they were attended; and of supposing this and that, in order to set them off in quite different Colours; that Men of a fertile Invention, may easily find Means on certain Occasions, of imposing upon the Credulity of others, without any scandalous Consequence in Prejudice of their Reputation.

I know it is said, That these and the like Artifices of disguising the Truth are necessary to such as propose to live in the World, and especially, if they would raise themselves to any publick or eminent Station; for in order to this it is requir'd, that they should conceal the true Motives upon which they act; That they should be thought Men of Honour, and fit to be trusted; but they can have no Prospect of succeeding in these Designs, without putting on at least the Appearance of Integrity, and affecting, what we therefore sometimes observe
in

in the most artful Statesmen, a *plain* easy manner, and an open Aspect.

And indeed were we only to consult our present Interest, and the Means which most effectually tend to promote it, we must grant, that should Men, who are ambitious of rendring themselves Considerable, be always oblig'd to act *bona Fide*; to speak the Truth, and nothing but the Truth. Upon this Supposition, I say, they would lay themselves so open, that those who had an Interest in obstructing them, might easily find Means to embarrass their Designs, and retard, or perhaps frustrate the Execution of them. This only shews, that the Maxims, whereby Men govern themselves, who resolve to make a Fortune at any rate, are sometimes opposite to those of Religion; but for that very Reason, Persons who make Profession of Religion, cannot without evidently *opposing* it, pretend to justify such Maxims, or to act upon them.

But tho' in certain Instances Men may find their Account more by practising the Arts of a deep Dissimulation, than by a plain and ingenious Freedom of Conversation; yet I do not doubt to affirm, that Sincerity generally speaking, is the most ready and probable means of Success. And herein I have the Judgment of the wisest of Men, and who has left us the most excellent Rules for the Conduct of Human Life. *I Wisdom*, says he, *dwell with Prudence*. The meaning is, that no one takes a more prudent or probable Method of bringing his Designs in this World to bear, than he who regulates his Conduct by the Rules of Piety and Religion; for which in the Writings of Solomon, *Wisdom* most

most commonly is but another Name. We have granted already, there may be particular Exceptions to what is here observ'd; but such Proverbial Sayings are to be understood as holding generally, not absolutely true; and wise Men are to regulate themselves not from what happens in particular and uncommon Cases, but according to the most ordinary Event of Things.

With respect to a Man's Reputation, which in all his Ways of Commerce with the World, is of so great Consequence to him, Sincerity must be allow'd, to have very much the Advantage of Dissimulation. For why indeed do Men falsify or dissemble, but for this very reason, that they would be thought sincere? And why are they desirous to be thought sincere? But because they are sensible Sincerity is a Quality esteem'd in the World, and necessary to procure them Favour and Credit. As Vice therefore generally affects to put on the Appearance of Virtue, we may say, that Dissimulation it self is a secret kind of *Homage*, which the most subtle and corrupt Men find themselves constrain'd to pay to Sincerity.

But what we are principally to examine, is not how far the Arts of Lying or Collusion may be of use, either with regard to the Interests or Reputation of Men, but whether we can reconcile them with the Maxims of our holy Religion; for if we profess our selves Christians, we are to govern our Conduct by the Laws of Christianity, and not by the Practise of a corrupt World, even tho' the greatest Names could be brought out of the Courts or Cabinets of Princes in all Ages to support such
a Pra-

a Practise. Let us see then how it agrees with those Precepts of Scripture ; which require Sincerity and Truth, without any impure or foreign Mixture ; for this is what the Apostle designs, 1 Cor. v. 8. by the Metaphor of *unleavened Bread*. That, *we should be sincere and without Offence*, Phil. iii. 10. And that, *putting away Lying, we should speak the Truth*, every Man to his Neighbour, Eph. iv. 25. to enforce which Rule, St. Paul adds this very powerful and cogent Reason, *That we are Members one of another*. And the Force of his Argument lies here, that as the Members of a Human Body, are united by certain Laws of Communication, and have the same common Interests ; so whether we consider our selves, under a civil or religious Distinction, as Members of Society we are severally, in our different Capacities, oblig'd to promote the common Good and Happiness of it ; but Speech being the great Instrument of our consulting and providing for these noble Ends, all Insincerity and equivocal Abuse of Words at once tend to destroy the natural Order and fundamental Rights of Society. Every Member of it, from the very End, for which God has given Speech to Mankind, having a just and inalienable Demand upon all Persons to speak the Truth, when they are oblig'd to speak at all to him.

But setting this Consideration aside, that a Lye how artfully soever prepar'd, is *malum in genere*, as being directly contrary to the Ends and Uses of Speech in its original Institution : Let us only suppose that it were a thing as indifferent to lye and dissemble, as to speak the Truth ; and that Men might innocently converse

verse together, without thinking themselves concern'd to believe a Word of what they should say one to another ; what strange Confusion and Disorder must of necessity arise from such a Conversation ? If after all a way of Talking, wherein Men propose not to be Intelligible, or to make their Words the Interpreters of their Thoughts, can be call'd Conversation. And yet this is the Confusion, in which every insincere Man, but especially the Liar, contributes what he can, to involve the World.

To tell a Man he lyes, is in effect then, and by direct Construction to charge him with a Design, so far as he is capable, of subverting all publick Peace and Order in Society. And since Crimes against the *State*, are generally attended with the greatest *Odour* and Infamy ; we have here one probable Reason, why the Imputation of a Lye is thought to have something in it, peculiarly offensive and provoking. In other Respects Men of any Temper or Prudence will bear much, before they fly out ; especially when they are told decently of their Faults, or perhaps even in a way of Raillery, that turns handsomely upon them : But no Consideration will excuse or soften the giving of a Lye ; there is something grating and of hard Digestion in it, when only given in *Jest* : But when charg'd upon any Person, with a direct and malevolent Intention of disgracing him ; this is the *last* Provocation, and of so high a Nature, that many times nothing but Blood is thought capable of expiating it. Not that I intend hereby to countenance those unchristian Methods of private Revenge, that are also condemn'd by the publick Laws, which the Imputation of a Lye
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has too often put the injurd Party upon; but only to shew how particularly cautious Men are of incurring Disgrace, by a Failure in those Duties, which they owe to Society in general; and which nothing is more prejudicial to the Interests of, than a perverting the Use of Speech; and that the Liar is chargeable with in the most scandalous Instance, except that of Perjury, which yet in effect is but a *Lye*, heightened with Circumstances of a more solemn Impiety.

Tho' there is another Reason, I take it, why the Charge of a Lye is generally thought so Insupportable. The Character wherein Men place their Glory is Courage, as that of Women is Chastity. Now there is nothing which so much betrays meanness of Spirit, and want of Courage as a Lye; for as Men naturally love Truth, they would always speak it, were they not restrain'd by an unmanly and degenerate fear of suffering one Inconvenience or other, should they faithfully declare their real Sentiments. But Cowardice is a Reproach, which of all others, Men, who have any regard either to their Honour or Interests, are the least able to bear. For what Expectations can a Person have from the World in either respect, who is neither fit to command nor to serve, to advise or to execute; and who is equally inconsiderable, whether we consider him as an Enemy or a Friend.

Sincerity does not only consist in speaking the Truth without Artifice or Disguise, but in being faithful to the outward Professions of Kindness and Respect which we make to other Men; and in satisfying them, that our Words speak
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the real Language of our Hearts. Under this Distinction we express Sincerity; by Candor and Ingenuity, as under the former by Veracity. But a Man of Candor by any outward Signification of what he intends in favour of another, will no more mislead him into a false Expectation, than a Man of Veracity will impose upon any Person, by a downright Falshood.

I mention nothing of the Injustice done by *promissory* Lyes, to those, who are so credulous as to entertain Hopes from them; nor of the common Pretences which are made to excuse them; *That* they are necessary to keep up the Dependencies of great Men; to give them a higher Air of Dignity and Power; and to prevent the World as much, and so long, as they possibly can, from entertaining any Prejudices against them, for want of generosity, or an Inclination at least to oblige. But I am not here considering the private Motives upon which Persons in eminent Stations, may sometimes be induced to act; but what is incumbent upon all good Men, without Distinction at *all* times. And tho' Candor and Ingenuity are not Terms expressly found in Scripture; yet the Import of them is, both in the Precepts of it, and the Practise of the Faithful recorded in it: To whom it was the great Matter of Joy and Triumph under their Sufferings. *That with Simplicity and godly Sincerity, not with fleshly Wisdom, but by the Grace of God they had their Conversation in the World,* 2 Cor. i. 12. And in the following Chapter, to shew that the Simplicity here mentioned, did not only respect their manner of Life, but their Fidelity in whatever they said, the Apostle gives them this Character. *That they spake as of*

Sincerity, as of God, and in the Sight of God, 2 Cor. ij. 17. than which there cannot be a more powerful Consideration to those, who believe a God, to make them always speak the real Sense of their Minds.

Yet I would not hereby insinuate, as if a Man were oblig'd to be so very open and communicative, as to let all Persons, without reserve, into all his Designs. The wisest of Men, would appear to act in many Cases very weakly, were they to form their Conduct by such a Rule. And indeed it would be a great Reproach upon Christianity to suppose Christian Prudence inconsistent with common Discretion. Our Blessed Saviour, by qualifying the Simplicity of the Dove, with the Wisdom of the Serpent, has plainly instructed us, that Candor is not only very reconcilable with Caution, but ought never to be separated from it.

Thirdly, I am to consider what is requir'd of us, with respect to a *Holy Conversation*. *Holiness* properly implies a Separation, whether of Things or Persons, from common and prophane Uses. Thus the Apostle directly opposes Holy to Unclean, 1 Cor. vij. 14. In another Place he makes it the great End of our *Election in Christ*, That we should be Holy, *Ephes. i. 4.* and *Heb. vij. 26.* He expresses the Holiness of *Christ* himself, by his being *Separate* from Sinners.

A holy Conversation therefore implies, That we should distinguish our selves on all Occasions, by expressing a just and awful Regard to the great God, *whose we Are, and whom we Serve*; That we should never speak of him but with the profoundest Veneration; That we should make
Religion

Religion as much as possible, and so far as may consist with the Honour and Dignity of it, the Subject of our Discourses: In a Word, That we should be careful on no Occasion whatever to offend against the Rules of strict Piety, but always appear to preserve at least, an habitual Sense of it, at the same time we are *actually* talking of common and indifferent Matters.

But there are two Vices oppos'd to a Holy Conversation, which we ought in Particular to Guard against, and those are Prophaneness and Impurity.

Prophaneness, as it respects common and customary Swearing, is so exploded a Vice in Conversation among all Persons, who would be thought fit, I do not say for Christian, but even for human Society, that there is no need of my using many Arguments to Caution you against it; against a Crime, I say, from which, it is so generally agreed, Reasons of common Decency ought to restrain those very Persons, who have no Regard to the Impiety of it.

A ludicrous and prophane Abuse of Things Sacred, is no less Opposite to the Holiness of Christian Conversation. I do not know whether this Vice is so generally Discountenanc'd, as the former: The Dressing up of Things Sacred in a humorous and odd Disguise, as it strikes the Imagination, may possibly be thought to have something in it of that bright and agreeable Quality, *Wit*; and Men are very difficultly persuaded, that it is a Crime in any Case to be Witty. Let us however suppose, that there may be Scope for an ingenious Conceit, in applying what is most Grave and Solemn to some ordinary or trifling Affair; yet this, it will be

allow'd, is but at the best a very low kind of Wit, which any Man who has Indiscretion enough to shew it, is almost capable of: For in this way of being Facetious, what has the Fortune sometimes not to give the Offence which ought to be taken, does not lie so much in the Ingenuity of the Conceit, as in the impious Boldness and Temerity of it. A poor Pretence indeed to Wit, which in the very Design of it, forfeits the Reputation of a Man's Wisdom; which is the most scandalous Instance of *Prophane and vain Babbling*, and forms itself only upon an idle Turn of Words, for which a strict and severe Account must be given at the last Day.

We are further oblig'd to a Holy Conversation, as it is oppos'd to all immodest and impure Language. The Liberties of Conversation in this respect, will not always bear a strict Examination, and are very Opposite to the Spirit of our Holy Religion. If we enquire into the Original of a Crime so unbecoming those, who profess the Gospel of Christ; it is sometimes owing, like that of Prophaneness, to a Pretence, such as it is, of Humour or Wit; but is the more Common, as it tends to excite those Ideas of sensual Objects, wherewith the Mind is too apt to be shaken: So that it is no Wonder, if Men of corrupt Hearts and desil'd Imaginations, naturally run into impure Allusions; and not only please themselves, but expect that others will not be altogether displeas'd with them; especially where they are distant, and not introduc'd after too gross and shocking a Manner. This only discovers to us *the Corruption that is in the World, through Lust*, and that there are Persons who profess Christianity, that
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do not regulate their Conversation by the Laws of it. For 'tis the Character of Christians in their regenerate State; That, *they have Crucify'd the Flesh, with the Affections and Lusts. That, they have put off concerning the former Conversation, the Old Man, which is Corrupt, according to deceitful Lusts, and that they have put on the New Man, which is created in Righteousness and true Holiness.*

To engage us to maintain and Support this Character, it is given us in Charge, That we should *let no corrupt Communication come out of our Mouth, but that which is Good to the Use of Edifying*, Ephes. iv. 19. And the Reason is added in the following Words; because hereby in a more special Manner we *grieve the Holy Spirit of God, the Spirit of Purity.* In the next Chapter, v. 3. the Apostle further commands, That *Fornication, and all Uncleaness or Covetousness* *πλεονεξία*, *should not be once nam'd among us as becometh Saints: Neither Filthiness, nor foolish Talking, nor Jestings, which are not convenient.*

I would only desire, by way of Conclusion to observe, that in exhorting you to such a Conversation, as becometh the Gospel of Christ, I have recommended nothing but what is highly becoming, with respect to all the Duties and Ornaments of *human Life.* The Design of Christianity is not to render Men less Agreeable in Civil Conversation, but to give it all the Brightness and Improvements it is capable of. What is required of us in our Intercourse with one another as Christians, is the most conducive to the Happiness of Society, and the *Decorum* which ought to be observ'd in it, if we consider our selves merely as Social Creatures. So that

if the Rules of Conversation, which have been prescrib'd, were duly observ'd; if *Goodness*, *Sincerity*, and *Piety*, were the inviolable Principles, upon which Men would resolve to converse together, how lovely and desirable would all Assemblies to this End be, in comparison of what they frequently are? What Regret would it then give us, even to think of traducing the Innocent; of having recourse to the little Arts of Lying and Dissimulation; or of advancing any thing contrary to the Maxims of a strict Purity: Certainly Conversation would be then so refin'd, so resembling of Heaven, that no *Unclean Thing* in any respect could be permitted to enter into it.

And indeed if we would order our Conversation right, in all the foregoing respects, it is to Heaven, at last, we must raise up our Thoughts. I have been willing to give human Considerations their due Weight, but still we shall fail very much in our Duty, if we act upon no higher a Principle than that of Decency or present Convenience, we must therefore Sanctify the Beauties of a Civil, by the Graces of a Christian Conversation; and whatever we speak, after the holy Example beforementioned, let us speak it *as of Sincerity, as of God, and in the Sight of God.* Amen.

SERMON II.

The Method of Preaching the Gospel, when it was first divulg'd, One considerable Proof of its Truth and Divinity ; with the Influence which this Consideration ought to have in several Respects upon us.

M A T. ij. 5.

— *And the Poor have the Gospel Preach'd unto them.*

THESE Words are part of our Saviour's Answer to the Two Disciples, who were sent by *John Baptist* to inquire of him, Whether he was the Messiah. For their Satisfaction in so important an Article, our Lord Appeals to the known and numerous Miracles, which had been done by him. *Go*, says he, in the Words preceding, *and shew John again those things, which ye do hear and see ; the Blind receive their Sight, and the Lame walk ; the Lepers are cleans'd and the deaf hear ; the Dead are rais'd up.* —

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These were Proofs with a Witness, and the strongest which could be given or demanded, that *Jesus* was the *Christ*; that he came from God, and that God was *with him*: What need then, may it be question'd, had our Blessed Saviour of any further Witness? Or why is this Circumstance added, as an Argument in the *last* Place, of his being the Messiah, which seems notwithstanding to have nothing Miraculous or very Extraordinary in it? That, *The Poor had the Gospel Preach'd unto them.*

That I may give the more clear and distinct Answer to a Question, which appears to have some reasonable Foundation, and will afford Matter for very useful Reflections, I shall discourse on the Words in the following Order.

First, I shall inquire who are here mean'd by the Poor.

Secondly, What we are to understand by their having the Gospel Preach'd unto them.

Thirdly, How their having the Gospel Preach'd unto them, was an Argument of our Saviour's Divine Mission and Authority. And,

Fourthly, I shall draw some practical Improvements from what has been said.

First, By the Poor, we are primarily to understand Persons of low Circumstances and Condition in the World; Inconsiderable, with respect to their Birth, or Education; or who have been brought up to some mean, and perhaps very servile Employment; one or more of these Characters, and sometimes all of them, enter into our Notion of a poor Man. And if we consider

der what fort of Men they were that our Saviour first call'd to be his Disciples, and to whom the Gospel was first Preach'd, we shall discover their *Poverty* in most, or all the fore-mentioned Respects, They were a Company of illiterate *Galileans*, and obscure Fishermen, altogether Strangers to Philosophy and the Sciences; and distinguish'd by nothing so much as their great *Plainness* and *Simplicity*; For,

Secondly, By the Poor, we are not only to understand Persons labouring under hard or indigent Circumstances of Life; but Men of an honest, meek, and humble Temper of Mind. There is a Poverty of Spirit, as there is of Condition, and which is common indeed to People of all Conditions: Yet, considering how high Men are apt to bear themselves upon the Advantages of this World, and to have their Heads turn'd by the Height of their Station in it; we may in general, more reasonably expect to find the Poor in Spirit, among the Poor in Condition. Accordingly our Saviour, during the Course of his Triennial Ministry, was chiefly conversant with Persons of the lowest Rank and Fortune in the World. These he chose to be his Auditors, his Companions and Friends, as being of a Temper which inclin'd them more readily to embrace the Gospel; and as having fewer Interests in this Life to prejudice them against it; or to occasion their Apostacy from it. And therefore our Lord begins that excellent Sermon, at the first opening of his Ministry upon the Mount, with this Beatitude, *Blessed are the Poor in Spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven*, Mat. v. 3. Whereby he signify'd to his Hearers, that a good and humble Temper of
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Mind, was the best Qualification to prepare them for receiving the great Truths of Religion, and to make the Grace of God operate upon their Hearts with its full force.

And here 'tis observable, that the Word which in the Text is render'd Poor, in the 61st of *Isaiah*, Ver. i. The Place refer'd to by our Saviour, is render'd *Meek*. *The Spirit of the Lord*, says the Prophet in his Name, *is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me* *εὐαγγελίζεσθαι ταπεινούς* (the very Words here used) *to preach the Gospel to the Meek, and to bind up the broken-hearted.*

The Young Man in the Gospel, who seem'd in so many Respects to be very well, and religiously disposed; yet for want of this one Qualification, *Poverty of Spirit*, forsook the Blessed Jesus, and render'd all his other good Dispositions of no effect towards his Conversion. And upon this occasion our Lord observes, how hard or rather *impossible* it was, without an extraordinary preventing Grace of God, to which all Things are possible, *for a rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*; that is, sincerely to embrace and profess the Christian Religion: For so the Kingdom of Heaven is here, and in several other Places, to be understood. A Religion, which in its Principles was so opposite to the Maxims of that corrupt Age, and the Profession whereof expos'd Men to unavoidable Sufferings and Persecutions, and frequently to such as were of all others most terrible to human Apprehension.

We are not then to wonder, if upon the first Preaching of the Gospel, as the Apostle observes, *Not many wise Men after the Flesh, not many mighty,*

ty, *not many noble* were *call'd*; But the early Converts to Christianity, were rather distinguish'd by a good and pious Disposition of Mind, than by the Superiority of their Fortune or Circumstances in the World. Shall we say, that the Poverty of their Condition render'd them proper Objects of Divine Grace, and their Poverty of Spirit more effectually dispos'd them to comply with and follow its Motions.

Secondly, I am to enquire what we are to understand by the Gospel being preach'd to the Poor. For tho' the Words may seem to import no more, than that our Saviour by his Preaching acquainted the Poor with the Nature and Design of Christianity; and let them know upon what Terms they might enter into his Kingdom and be sav'd. Yet 'tis probable he may not only have respect here to the Matter, but also to the Manner of his Preaching unto them; and that was by condescending to their Capacities, by a free easy and familiar way of discoursing to them, and by bringing down the heavenly Doctrines he taught, as near as possible to their very Senses. And to this End in particular he so frequently made use of Parables; and after the same manner still continues to Preach to the Poor, having caus'd those excellent Schemes of Instruction to be deliver'd down for the Benefit of all succeeding Ages *in a standing Writing*. And what Method could have been contriv'd more suitable to the ordinary Capacities of Men? Than that, which let them into the most sublime and important Truths by sensible Arguments, by easy and familiar Representations taken from probable Occurrences of Human Life, which chalk'd out the Rules
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of their Duty to them, as it were in visible Lines; so that the weakest are capable of seeing them, and the wisest cannot but admire the excellent Order and Design of them.

As our Lord condescended to the ordinary Capacities of Men in his frequent use of Parables, so did he also, and continues to do, by the easy and familiar *sublime* of his Stile. In his admirable Sermon upon the Mount, which contains the Sum of the Christian Religion, with respect to moral Duties, we observe no rethorical Arts of Speech, or elaborate Periods; such as we ordinarily meet with in *Plato*, *Tully*, and other Heathen Moralists; which often indeed amuse and divert our Thoughts in an agreeable manner, but seldom speak to the Heart, and therefore seem rather to have been originally design'd for the Pleasure than the Profit of their Readers: if perhaps as superior to both these Regards, they did not consult their own Glory or Applause.

In certain Schools of the ancient Philosophers, they had a sort of *Cabala*, or secret Tradition, which was communicated to them, if I may so speak, under the Seal of Confession. None but those of their own Sect could, without a high Profanation, be let into the Mysteries of it. And for this reason their Principles were convey'd down in remote and obscure Expressions; which they only, who had a Key to them, were capable of unfolding. As to the Prophane Vulgar, for so the proud Philosophers esteem'd them, they were look'd upon with too great Contempt to have any due Care taken for their Instruction even in the fundamental and necessary Points of *Morality*.

But

But it being the Will of God, that all Men who were to have the Means of Salvation tender'd to them, should be fav'd, and *come to the Knowledge of the Truth*, our Saviour in the Discharge of his Prophetical Office adapted the Means to so gracious an End, and consulted rather what might be of most obvious and general Use to Mankind, than what might tend to gratify the Inclination or Curiosity of particular Persons.

And herein he acted conformably, not only to his own and his Father's Desire, that every Person to whom the Gospel might be Preach'd, should be brought to the Acknowledgment of the Truth, but to an express Prophecy in Scripture concerning the Gospel Dispensation; That *All Men* should then *know God*, or have the Means of knowing him indifferently afforded them, *from the least to the greatest*. But I proceed,

Thirdly, To enquire how our Saviour's Preaching the Gospel to the Poor, was an Argument of his Divine Mission and Authority. To which Enquiry, the Explication already given of the Words, if we reflect a little upon it, will enable us to give a full and satisfactory Answer. For,

1st, If by the Poor we understand Persons of a low and mean Condition in the World, our Saviour's addressing himself principally to such Persons, and his chusing them to be his Companions and Disciples made, it evidently appear, that the Religion he came to plant in the World, wanted nothing to recommend and support it, but the native Truth and Excellency of it, and the Confirmation which the several Miracles
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work'd by him, had given to it. Had he come as a *Deceiver of the People*, and with a Design of gaining Profelites among them, under the Pretence of setting up a new Religion, it is natural to suppose, if the Supposition it self may be allow'd, that in order to credit and promote such a Design, he would have sought the Favour of the Great, or the Conversation of the Learned: Especially at a time when there was so general an Expectation among all sorts of People of the *Messiah's* coming. Instead of this Christ first discovers himself, and Preaches the Gospel to a company of obscure illiterate Persons from whom he could have no Expectations of Favour or Interest; and which is still more, he chuses Twelve of them to be the first Ministers in his Church, and empowers them to Preach the same Gospel to others.

By this Means, I say, our Lord obviated one of the most specious Objections that could have been raised against the Truth and Divinity of his Holy Religion. Had he chose his Apostles from among the Learned *Rabbies* of the *Jews*, or out of the celebrated Schools of *Athens*; who by their Authority or sophistical Arts of Persuasion might have impos'd upon the Credulity of more ignorant Persons; Or had he made use of the famous Orators and Poets, which at that time flourish'd in *Rome*, who might have charm'd the Minds of Men, with moving Expressions, or tuneful Numbers. Why, then it might have been with more shew of Reason pretended, that Christianity was nothing but a *cunningly devis'd Fable*, that the Growth of it, which Unbelievers would still pretend, was owing to mere Human Artifice, or the Craft
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of those who had some Interest or Vanity to serve in deceiving others.

Again ; Had the first Disciples of our Lord been Persons considerable for their Quality or Fortune, their Power or Alliances in the World, it might then have been presum'd, that the Reason why Christianity obtain'd so fast, and spread it self so wide, was not to be ascrib'd to the force of Truth, or the Evidence of Miracles, whereby it is said to have been confirm'd ; but as other Religions in the World owe their Origin and Progress to mere Human Causes, or a well-improv'd Concurrence of Force and Policy.

To obviate any Prejudices of this Kind against his Holy Religion, our Saviour wisely made choice of such Persons to Preach it, who had no personal Advantages to recommend them to so great an Undertaking ; who had neither Learning whereby they might be suppos'd to pervert ; nor Power to over-awe, nor Interest to bribe the Judgment of those they Preach'd to.

And indeed that Twelve such inconsiderable Persons on all these Accounts, were yet able in so little a compass of Time to convert great Numbers, both of *Jews* and Idolatrous Heathens to the Christian Faith, against the settled Laws and Powers of the World ; against all the Opposition their Doctrine every where met with ; and against the corrupt Principles and Passions of Men, which it was design'd to correct : This, I say, tho' the *Truth* of Christianity was sufficiently establish'd by the other miraculous Works our Saviour here mentions, yet seems to have been the greatest *Miracle* of all.

What

What could a Combination of such Men have done towards the establishing a New and Holy Religion in the World, under so many Disadvantages; or rather how can we suppose it had been possible for them to have engag'd in a Design, to which they were altogether unequal, *If God had not been with them.*

One would as soon have thought, that a single and unarm'd Man might have conquer'd the *Roman* Legions, as that the Christian Religion could have been planted in the World by the Ministry of such inconsiderable Persons. A Religion every where evil spoken of, and evil intreated, as a dangerous Innovation, both upon the *Jewish* and *Gentile* Worship. So that we may infer, if the Doctrine, which Christ came to Preach had been of Men, but especially of such Men as were neither recommended by their Learning, their Interest, or any secular Advantage, it would certainly *have come to nought*: But seeing after all the Opposition and Discouragements the first Disciples of our Lord met with, great Numbers of Profelites were still added to the Faith by their Preaching and Labours; this seems a very convincing Argument, that the Doctrine which they taught *was of God*. For to what can we impute an Effect, to which the Means that were employ'd to produce it, were so wholly Disproportionate? To what, but that Divine Power which can equally operate any Event with Means, or without Means; and to which those Things are possible, that with Men are impossible.

2dly, If we consider the first Disciples of Christ in the other Sense, *as poor in Spirit*; as Persons of an honest, meek and humble Temper

per of Mind. This is still a further Argument, that Jesus was the Christ, and of the Truth of that Holy Religion which he came to Preach to them. If they had been only Poor, with respect to their outward Condition of Life; it might have been objected to them, that they embrac'd the Christian Religion, and however unqualified, yet engag'd in the Design of promoting it, upon the Prospect of some extraordinary Interest or Advantage; for Men who are acted by any such Views, will set all the Springs of Motion at work; despise Difficulties and Dangers; and exert themselves in attempting things which are to Appearance above their Reach or Abilities. Thus the first Disciples of Christ, being supposed Persons of a low and mean Condition in the World, but, as it sometimes happens with Men of like Circumstances, being of a high and aspiring Temper of Mind, they might in hopes of making themselves considerable, and advancing their Fortune, have been induc'd to profess the Christian Religion, and to have undertaken the Business of Preaching it to others; and being once engag'd in the Undertaking, their Zeal and Diligence, animated by their Ambition, might have carry'd them thro' very many and great Difficulties.

This, I presume, is what the Enemies of our Holy Religion might think of objecting to us, when we should urge to them the Success of it under the Conduct and Ministry of a few poor and illiterate Men, as an Argument of its Truth and Divinity.

And indeed there would be some reasonable Pretence for the Objection, if the first Converts to Christianity had been invited or drawn in to

embrace it upon any worldly Motives, or Considerations. It is evident on the other hand, that one great Design of the first Sermon our Lord Preach'd, was to encourage his Disciples against Sufferings and Persecutions, and what ambitious Minds are the least capable of submitting to, against Calumny and Disgrace. And when he Commission'd a select Number of them to Preach the Gospel, they were told, *Mat. x. 16.* That he *sent them forth as Sheep in the midst of Wolves.* Naked and Unarm'd against malicious and powerful Enemies on every side. That *they should be delivered up to the Councils, and Scourg'd in the Synagogues, v. 17.* and that *even their own Kindred should betray and cause them to be put to death, v. 27.* This was but poor Consolation to Men, who had nothing further in Prospect, than their Temporal Ease or Advantage; or rather indeed, what could have tended more directly to oppose or contradict the Designs of such Men?

Upon the whole Matter, seeing the first Disciples of our Saviour did not embrace Christianity upon any worldly Expectations, but on Conditions wholly incompatible with the Interests of this Life; what greater Argument could such innocent and undesigning Men give, that they were not influenc'd by any worldly Motives, but boldly asserted and preach'd the Truth, from a full and sincere Conviction of it. But further,

Thirdly, The very manner of our Saviour's Preaching the Gospel, is no inconsiderable Argument of its Truth. For he not only Preach'd such Doctrines, as most effectually tend to promote the great End of all Religion, *Holiness,*
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but he deliver'd them with that Plainness and Perspicuity, that there is no Man who employs the ordinary Means of Instruction, can have any just Pretence for his Ignorance of them.

It might perhaps have been more agreeable to the Genius of some Men, if our Saviour had deliver'd himself in a more rhetorical and pompous Stile, or entertain'd his Hearers with curious and philosophical Disquisitions. And 'tis probable indeed, had he not been a Teacher sent from God, he would, agreeably to the Design of most human Authors, have gratify'd the Curiosity of those, to whom he address'd his Discourses, by condescending to the popular and human Arts of Persuasion. But 'tis below Persons in Authority, to bespeak the Favour of those who are to receive the Laws from them; or to use any mean Insinuations to persuade, what they have a Right, a Right supported by the clearest Reason, to command.

And therefore in the conclusion of our Saviour's excellent Sermon on the Mount, it is assign'd as the Cause, why the People were astonish'd at his Doctrine, that *he spake as one having Authority, and not as the Scribes.* That is, He deliver'd his Doctrine to the Jews as a Law-giver, who was able to *Save and to Destroy*; and not after the manner of those popular Teachers, who were to make good what they said, by specious Sophistry, or a vain Shew of human Learning.

Having consider'd in these several Respects, why our Saviour, after he had appeal'd to the Miracles he had done, mentions his Preaching the Gospel to the Poor, as a further Argument of his being the Messiah, I am

Fourthly, And in the last Place, to draw some practical Improvement from what has been said. And,

1. I would lay it down as a useful Inference, That all Men, whatever hard or mean Circumstances of Life the Providence of God has put them under, have great Reason patiently to submit to his *Will*. For 'tis necessary, in order to the Support and common Good of Society, that Men should be distinguish'd from one another, by their outward Condition in this World. Upon a suppos'd equality in their Fortunes, nothing but Confusion and Disorder would follow; a stop would soon be put to all Labour and Industry, and the Improvement of useful Arts and Sciences.

And therefore the wise Governor of the World has so order'd it; that there should be in this Life, different Ranks and Degrees of Men; High and Low, Rich and Poor, one with another.

But these Distinctions arising from the Nature and Necessity of our present State, we cannot judge with any Certainty from them, concerning God's Love or Hatred to Men. And therefore as 'tis the Duty of a Brother of low Degree *to rejoice in that he is Exalted*, it is also matter of Joy *to the Rich, that he is made Low*, James i. 9. Poverty and Riches being Things of no further Consideration, than they are more or less subservient towards promoting the one thing, in comparison, necessary; the Happiness of our Souls to all Eternity.

Indeed,

Indeed, tho' neither a State of Poverty or Wealth, is in itself consider'd an Argument of the Divine Favour, or Displeasure; yet of the two, there seems to be more advantageous Things spoken in Scripture concerning a State of Poverty. It was to the Poor, as we have heard, that the Gospel was first Preach'd: They were the Persons, whom our Lord on all occasions express'd so great Tendernefs and Compassion for: They, while he was here upon Earth, were his chosen Disciples, his Companions, and, which includes all other Testimonies of Respect, his *Friends*. I shall only add, that it is in favour of them the Apostle St. James puts the Question with a visible Exultation, *chap. ij. 5. Hath not God chosen the Poor of this World, rich in Faith, and Heirs of the Kingdom, which he hath promis'd to them that love him.*

I do not hereby intend that a State of Poverty is in itself desirable. It is every Man's Duty to render himself as useful as he can, in Society: To which end, whether he be considered in a Civil or Religious Capacity, a plentiful Condition in the World is certainly very subservient; and is indeed suppos'd so by those Promises in Scripture, concerning Temporal Blessings, whereby God has been pleas'd to encourage the Piety and Obedience of Men.

It was not therefore from any reasonable Principle, that some of the Philosophers, and especially the *Cynicks*, endeavour'd to cry down Riches and bring them into Contempt; but from an Ambition of being thought above the World; or perhaps in order to revenge themselves upon Fortune, because she had not been more liberal of her Favours to them. As to

those, who were possess'd of any considerable Riches, but desir'd to distinguish themselves by a voluntary Poverty, their affecting *to be like the Gods*, who wanted nothing, sooth'd their Vanity and Arrogance to such a degree, as made them prefer Misery to the greatest Blessings and Conveniencies of Life: So great is the force of human Pride, and so difficult to account for the Conduct of these Philosophical Sages, upon any other Principle.

But tho' we are not to despise the Advantages of this World, both Reason and Religion teach us to be perfectly resign'd to God's Will, in the want of them. And in particular, the Words of my Text afford unspeakable Matter of Consolation to those, who are expos'd to the greatest Miseries and Hardships, that attend an indigent Condition; for they are hereby assur'd, that God has regard to their great and supreme Interest; that he Wills their Salvation; and that in dispensing the Means of it, they are entitled to a Mark of Distinction in his Favour. And certainly if they at last enter into the Kingdom of God, tho' *with much Tribulation*, they will have no Reason for Dissatisfaction or Complaint.

2. From what has been said, Persons of Superior Condition may learn the Duties of Respect and Charity to the Poor. It is too ordinary for Men to treat those who are much below them, with Indifference, not to say a secret Contempt. This does not only proceed from their Pride, but their Ignorance of what is owing to the Dignity of human Nature; which being in all Persons Originally the same, *simple Esteem* is equally due to all Mankind; and if we are oblig'd
to

to give Marks of a higher Deference to some Men than to others, in our external Behaviour towards them; yet this is not a Homage so much due to their Persons abstractedly consider'd, as to their Quality, their Relation to us, their Authority, or other accidental and civil Considerations. An unanswerable Argument may be drawn from the Words of *Solomon*, why we should treat People of the lowest Rank, after a respectful and condescending manner. *The Rich*, says he, *and the Poor meet together; the Lord is the Maker of them both.* The poorest Man that lives is the Creature of God, and created after his Image. This one Consideration gives him a Right, an inalienable Right to our Respect; and interpretatively renders every Contempt done to him, a Dishonour done to God. Tho' what I would principally recommend to your Consideration is, that the Poor ought to share the Duties of common Esteem, as they have a common Right to all the Blessings and glorious Privileges of the Gospel; we cannot think our selves excusable in despising or using those Persons ill, whose State of Life our Lord and his Apostles have done so much Honour to; and to which so special a Regard was had, in the first opening of the Gospel Dispensation.

We may hence also learn the Duty of Charity to the Poor. If our Lord were so much concern'd for their Interest and Advantage, then, besides all other Obligations to this Duty, we ought, in Imitation of his Example, to contribute what we severally can, to their Comfort and Relief. Especially since he is

pleas'd to take the good Offices, we do to them, as a Debt upon himself. Let us therefore, in order to excite us to the Performance of a Sacrifice so acceptable to him, remember, that we have the Poor always with us; that he has made this one Motive of our Charity to them; and that inasmuch as we do an Act of Beneficence to any of them, *we do it unto him.*

3. The Duty which I shall take occasion, in the last Place to recommend, as of universal Obligation to all Orders and Degrees of Men, is that of Humility, or Poverty of Spirit, so necessary, to qualify us for receiving the Truths of Religion, and to make us submit, without reserve, to them: And indeed, without this Qualification, were our Saviour to descend again from Heaven to Preach the Gospel to Unbelievers, his Divine Instructions would, humanly speaking, have no more effect upon them, than they had upon the perverse and obstinate *Jews*: Even those who do in general believe the Articles of the Christian Faith, have reason to Pray for this humble and obedient Temper of Mind, to strengthen their Belief; or if they have imbib'd any Error, especially any publick or dangerous Error, to dispose them to a more ready and open acknowledgment of the Truth: For what has been the Original Ground of the most dangerous Schisms, and damnable *Heresies* in the Church of Christ, but the Pride, and in Consequence of it, the Obstinacy of Men: Who not thinking themselves sufficiently distinguish'd by professing the plain and commonly receiv'd

Prin-

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Principles, have endeavour'd to subvert them; and upon a View of rendring themselves more considerable, to superstruct their own Schemes or *Theories* upon the Ruins of them. And having once, tho' without due Examination, communicated their Discoveries to the World, the next thing to be consider'd, is not whether they shall ingenuously own or retract their Mistakes, but when they find any opposition, how they shall best palliate or refine upon them. So that a Retreat is no where more difficultly made, or thought, tho' very uniuistly, more dishonourable, than when Learned Men engage in Defence of Principles, they have once publicly espous'd.

The Effects of Pride do not only appear in betraying particular Persons into Error, and rendring them obstinate to all the Means of Conviction; But whole Churches, wherein, notwithstanding there are Men of admirable Parts and Learning, sometimes maintain Doctrines as Articles of Faith, which have no reasonable or scriptural Foundation. Other Causes may be assign'd for so general a Prejudice, but that I have mention'd is for the most part of great Force, both in the Origin and Support of it.

To prevent our falling into *singular* Notions contrary to the Rule of Faith; or our being carry'd away by any dangerous Errors how popular or prevailing soever; I cannot advise a better Preservative, than that humble and obedient Temper which has been express'd by Poverty of Spirit; and is no other Virtue, but what is contain'd in those Scriptures, which require,

quire, that we should *not think of our selves more highly, than we ought to think, but soberly*, Rom. xij. 3. That we should learn, *not think above what is written*, 1 Cor. iv. 6. That with *Meekness* we should receive the ingrafted Word, which is able to *save our Souls*. And to conclude all, That nothing should be done through *Strife or Vain-glory*, but in *lowliness of Mind*, Phil. ij. 3. *Amen.*

S E R-

S E R M O N III.

Watchfulness one great Preservative
against Temptation, and in what
Respects.

MATTH. XXVI. 41.

Watch and Pray, that you enter not into Temptation.

TH E S E Words were spoken by our Lord, to Three of his Disciples, when he was under a very sensible Apprehension himself, of his being betray'd into the Hands of Sinners; upon this, he exhorts them to *Watch and Pray*, lest they should be tempted, out of any Motive of Self-love, or Fear of Danger to Apostatize with *Judas* from him. *Watch and Pray*, that ye also, and in particular *Peter* (ver. 35.) who is so very confident of his own Strength, *enter not into Temptation*.

This

We have here the particular occasion of our Lord's speaking these Words, but the Reason of them extends to all Christians, at all times. This appears from the other general Texts of Scripture, where Watching and Prayer are joyn'd together, as if they were Duties inseperable, and which mutually conspire to animate and support each other. Thus our Saviour having before discours'd of the Certainty of a future Judgment, and the uncertain Time of it, exhorts all Christians, *Matth. xxij. 33. to watch and pray*, because they know not when the Time is: To the same effect is that Command, *Luke xxi. 36. Watch ye therefore, and pray always*. And to mention at present no more Texts of this kind; we are charg'd *Ephes. vij. 18. to pray always*, and to *watch* thereunto with all Perseverance.

I shall therefore consider the Words, not with respect to the particular Persons to whom they were given in charge, but as a standing and general Rule to all Christians. There being no Christian in any State or Condition of Life exempt from Temptation; nor consequently from the Reason, upon which the Duties of Watchfulness and Prayer are here enjoyn'd. *Watch therefore and pray, that You enter not into Temptation.*

The Words evidently contain this Doctrine or Proposition; that Watchfulness and Prayer are proper and powerful Preservatives against Temptation. But I shall particularly at this time confine my self to recommend to you the Duty of Watchfulness, and to show the Efficacy of it in order to preserve us from Temptation, in these Three Respects.

1st. As

1st, As it implies a State of Sobriety and Self-denial.

2^{dly}, A cautious and considerate Temper of Mind.

3^{dly}, A due Regard to the Strength or Artifices of the Enemy, we have to deal with.

And 1st, This Duty of Watchfulness is a proper Preservative against Temptation, as it implies a State of Sobriety and Self-denial.

Sobriety is always a Virtue, and there is no Dispensation in the Christian Religion, for excess upon any Account, or in any kind. Nay the great Ends of Eating and Drinking being to preserve Life and Health, natural Religion it self teaches us, that whatever is contrary to these Ends, as all Acts of Intemperance are, is also Criminal, and contrary to Order.

Intemperance is irregular and vitious in itself; It ought however, in every Kind and Degree of it, to be avoided, and by all Christians especially, that would preserve their Innocence; as it is a great and visible occasion of much Impiety and Disorder; as it tends to feed and strengthen natural Concupiscence; to inflame the Passions; to dimn the Light, and dull the Powers of Reason; and to defile the Imagination with gross and impure Ideas.

Particularly therefore at a time, when we would seriously apply to the Business of Religion, and give our selves up more intirely to the Practise of Piety, and Devotion; we ought to forbear all manner of Irregularity and Excess; To restrain our sensual Appetites from all Indulgence to such Gratifications, which
are

are apt to render the Mind dull and heavy, and unfit for the Spiritual Exercises, and nobler Operations of Reason.

Accordingly the Apostle, *1 Pet. iv. 7.* joins Sobriety with Watchfulness, as necessary Qualifications to Spiritualize our Affections, and render our Devotions acceptable to God. *Be ye therefore,* says he, *sober and watch unto Prayer.* And our Lord, the more to enforce that Charge to his Disciple, *Luke xxi. 36.* *to watch and pray always,* particularly caution'd them at the 34th Verse against all criminal Excess in Eating or Drinking. *Take heed, to your selves, least at any time your Hearts be overcharg'd with Surfeiting and Drunkenness.*

But to keep within the Bounds of Sobriety, and not to exceed, in gratifying our irregular Inclinations of any kind, is but a low degree of Christian Virtue; 'Tis further requir'd, that we should on many Occasions restrain our natural Liberty, and forbear the Use of Things, even in themselves lawful and innocent; and therefore I added Self-denial, as another Adjunct of that Watchfulness, which is requir'd in all truly pious and devout Christians.

To this end are the Commands in Scripture of *not using our Liberty for an Occasion of the Flesh;* of *crucifying the Flesh with the Affections and Lusts;* and *Coloss. iii. 5.* of *mortifying our Members which are upon the Earth.*

Our Saviour has recommended this Duty of Self-denial to us by his own Example; the best of Men in all Ages have practis'd it; and all those, who have prescrib'd the Rules of *Holy Living,* have strictly enjoin'd it.

St. Paul

St. Paul in particular did not only lay many voluntary and severe Restraints upon himself, but has given us an unanswerable Reason why all Christians, that would regulate their Piety by the Laws of Prudence, should imitate his Conduct. *All things, says he, are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient. All things are lawful for me, but I will not come under the Power of any, i. e.* all things which tend to gratify our natural and reasonable Appetites, are, consider'd in themselves, lawful and innocent; but because they many times accidentally prove an occasion of betraying us into certain Disorders, or of indisposing us to our Duty; therefore we ought in all such Cases, to forbear the Use of them, and not endanger our Christian Innocence, by indulging our natural Freedom.

In the State of Innocence, Man had an absolute Power over himself; he could stop the Motions of his natural Appetites when he pleased; the Soul then gave Laws with a sovereign Authority to the Body; or rather perhaps, the Organs of the Body were so exactly tun'd, that the Appetites of it were a Law unto themselves: But this original and admirable Harmony betwixt these two Substances, being broken, the Body now speaks in a more haughty and imperious *Tone*, and pretends to give Laws to the Soul.

The Apostle in his Epistle to the *Romans*, shows the impotent and deprav'd State, into which Human Nature, with respect even to the more noble and excellent Powers of it, is sunk since the Fall; and had not he told us of a Law in our Members, waring against the Law of our Mind, 'tis no more than what every
Man's

Man's Experience convinces him every Day of.

This being the Condition we are fallen into by Sin, in order to reinstate Reason in its Throne, it is not enough, that we do not indulge our bodily Appetites in any criminal Excesses, but we must also keep them under; we must endeavour to kill the *Old Man*, by employing all the Means of Mortification and Self-denial, which tend to procure his Death; It is not lawful for us to procure the Dissolution of our Soul and Body, but we may, nay we ought to *dye* unto the World, and do what we can to disarm Concupiscence of its Strength, in order to preserve the Life of Grace in our Souls.

Not but that Temptations are incident to Persons that Practise the greatest Austerities; our Lord himself was tempted, during the Time of his Fasting and Retirement in the Wilderness; and perhaps the Tempter is never more Designing, or Active in his Endeavours to seduce Men, than when they deny themselves the Innocent Comforts, and Freedoms of Life, the better to attend the Duties of Piety, without Distraction of Mind.

But what I intend is, That a State of Self-Denial, tho' it do not deliver us from the Attacks of Temptation, yet it mightily conduces to weaken the Force of them; by keeping the Mind in an even Calm, and sedate Temper; and the Body in a more regular Subjection to it; but above all, by recommending us to the Favour of Almighty God; who has declared Himself, on so many Occasions, well pleased with such voluntary Sacrifices.

Among

Among other Acts of Self-Denial, Fasting has always been accounted a principal One. As to the proper Seasons of it, Men will best determine themselves from the particular Circumstances of Temptation, they may be under ; but certainly 'tis incumbent upon all good and pious Christians, to observe those Times of it especially which the Church, in the Communion of which they live, has set apart for it.

The great End, for which God has appointed Spiritual Guides and Governors over us, being to promote Piety ; whatever conduces to this End (and proper Seasons of Fasting and Humiliation, if duly observed, evidently do) have, in effect, the Force of a Divine Command to us. In this Case, to be sure, the Precept is Obligatory, that *we should obey them, which have the Rule over us, as they that watch for our Souls.*

The most solemn, and the most general Season in the Churches of God for this Duty, is the Time of *Lent*, in Imitation of our Lord's Forty Days of Fasting in the Wilderness: 'Tis true, His Fast was Miraculous ; and this has been urged as an Argument against the Observation of *Lent*, as 'tis commonly Solemnized : But certainly where we cannot imitate Christ in the Miracle, 'tis Pious, at least, to follow Him at a Distance, in the Reasons of it ; especially where all the Reasons of Abstinence and Self-Denial are so much stronger to us, than they could be supposed to be, in the Innocent, the Holy, the Divine Person of Jesus Christ.

I do not hereby suppose that all Persons, during this Season of *Lent*, are indispensably obliged to abstain from particular Kinds of Meat ; this being only a Circumstance of Fast-

ing, and no ways Essential to it, where Reasons of Health or Necessity require, it may be dispensed with; but yet where Men do not find themselves acquitted by these or other important Considerations, I think, with all Submission, the Orders and constant Practice of the Church do oblige the Conscience; that they ought however to be look'd upon by all modest Christians, as Rules of Piety and Prudence, if not of strict Necessity: But,

2dly, The Duty I am recommending, implies a cautious and considerate Temper of Mind. Every Man may consult his own Experience, how often he has committed Sin; not from the Force of Temptation, but through Inadvertency, or Surprise. There are some Sins in particular, which out of Respect to the common Sense and Reason of Mankind, we ought not to suppose, they could be Guilty of, would they take the least Time to consider the Nature, and flaming Guilt of them.

Of this Kind is idle and prophane Swearing; so Dishonourable to God and Religion; and so Affronting to all good Men; so Inconsistent with all the Rules of Decency and Manners; especially in Persons of Distinction, and in a polite Age.

But what shall we think then of those horrid and dreadful Imprecations, whereby Men defy the living God, whom yet they profess to serve, in so open and audacious a manner. It may be questioned, whether this Kind of Impiety was ever carried to so high a Pitch, in any Age or Nation of the Heathen World, or even in Hell it self: 'Tis probable, the Devils, who already feel the Effects of God's Wrath, do not impre-

imprecate upon themselves fresh and further Degrees of it. What an abominable and absurd Thing then is it, for Christians, who pretend to believe the *Terrors of the Lord*, to call down, in Terms, which cannot be mentioned without Horror, that Vengeance upon their own Heads which they have justly incurr'd, and which God, perhaps, stands ready to inflict, without such provoking Challenges.

An awful Fear of offending the Just and All-Powerful God, is a natural, or rather necessary Effect of Consideration; *Therefore*, says Holy *Job*, *Am I troubled at his Presence; when I consider, I am afraid of him*, *Job* xxiii. 15. How can we then imagine that Men, who are Guilty of these crying Sins, and whereby in effect they deny God's *Omnipresence*, can have any Thought or Reflection, during the Time of their committing them?

Another common Sin of Inadvertency, is *Evil Speaking*. Do not we know, how apt Men are to Poison even the most innocent and generous Actions, with sly or unjust Imputations, and that Scandal is one of the common and ordinary Entertainments of Conversation? I do not speak of it as it proceeds from Malice, or a Motive of Interest; but from a certain latent Malignity of Temper, where we have no Reasons of Prejudice, nor so much as pretend any, against the Persons we traduce or defame.

Now to say nothing of the Obligations of Christian Charity, the great Test of our Holy Religion; if we would but consider those of common Justice and Ingenuity, when we speak of the Designs or Actions of other Men, 'twould be a most effectual Preservative to us, unless

we are altogether insensible to the Impressions of Conscience, against this spreading and common Contagion.

Let us therefore upon all Provocations, upon all Temptations of Vanity, or Affectation of Wit ; or a secret Depravity of Temper, that may incline us to speak Evil of other Men, take heed to our own Ways. Let us recollect our selves, and consider the many ill, and perhaps irreparable, Effects of Detraction, *that we offend not with the Tongue* : Let us Pray with the Holy Psalmist in another Place, that God would on all such Occasions, *set a Watch* before our Mouth, and keep the Door of our Lips.

I might further observe, how often we are betrayed into Sin through Inadvertency, or want of Attention, with respect to our Actions, as well as Words. How often should we preserve our selves from being caught, if, before we enter upon any Action, we would but take Time to consult Reason, and examine the Fitness, the Decency, the Lawfulness of it. And indeed without such Examination we are not so properly Rational, as Blind and *Mechanical* Agents.

To prevent those Disorders we are apt, thro' Inadvertency, to fall into, the Scriptures command us, *to keep our Hearts with all Diligence*, Prov. iv. 23. *To stand in Awe, and Commune with our own Hearts*, Psal. iv. 4. and to take heed (*Psal. cxix. 9.*) to the unerring Rule of God's Word ; wherein Holy David was so Conversant, that he prevented *the Night Watches*.

Watch therefore ; that is, before you speak or act, deliberate well upon the subject Matter of your Words and Actions ; be cautious in every
Thing

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Thing you say, or do; that you offend not against the Rules of Piety or Prudence, of Justice or Charity. *Solomon* makes it the Character of a Wise Man, to foresee an Evil, and hide himself. But no Man sure can long preserve the Character of a good Man, who does not prepare and forearm himself against the Surprise of Temptation. It is with great Reason therefore the Prophet makes Foresight the happy Preservative of Innocence. *Blessed is the Man who observeth his Hand, or keeps a watchful Eye upon his own Actions, least he do any Evil, Isa. lvi. 2.*

But I proceed to my Third and last Particular, to consider this Duty of Watchfulness, as it implies a due Regard to the Strength or Artifices of the Enemy we have to deal with.

We have on every Hand a great many powerful and subtle Enemies; our own vitious Inclinations are continually prompting us from within; the Body never moves, but for the Gratification of the Senses; the Imagination is fill'd with the Impressions it takes from sensible Objects; and the more lively and delicate it is, the more bright are the Colours wherein it dresses up Vice, and the more it provokes and fortifies the Passions. This may be one reason why your great Wits prove many times the greatest Libertines, and give themselves up to the most extravagant Follies. They cannot endure the Labour of Attention; they are push'd on with the pleasing Force of a ready and lively Apprehension, without waiting for the Orders of Reason, or perhaps so much as enquiring what Reason has to remonstrate. So that in Matters of Religion, and very often too in

the common Affairs of Life, which require Thought and Judgment, none are more dark and ignorant than your Men of Wit.

But above all, long and permanent Habits of Sin enslave us to our Passions; and at once render us Impotent, and Indispos'd to free our selves from that grateful Captivity, wherein they hold us. It is hard to break a Habit of any kind; but where we fight against the Bent of a *vitious* habitual Inclination, that has got the Dominion over our Hearts; where our very Desires to overcome, are at first Painful and Uneasy; the Victory must still be more doubtful, and obtain'd with much greater Difficulty. And therefore it more especially concerns those, who have liv'd for any time in a course of Sin, to watch narrowly over the Motions of their own Hearts, and to Arm themselves with a very strong, and steddly Resolution against those Bosom Enemies, which are so apt at once to Discourage; and to Betray them.

We are likewise expos'd to a great many Enemies from without, in our Conversation and Commerce with the World. Ill and publick Example, is very Contagious: We are naturally dispos'd, and as it were mechanically form'd, for Imitation. And there are certain Vices, which it is not easy for Men to give an Account of their committing, but from the Impressions they take of them, from other People.

How often does a false Shame, or Apprehension of not appearing Agreeable, betray even good Men into Compliances, which are not to be nicely Examin'd? How often does an Inclination to oblige our Friends or Patrons, tempt us go along with them, beyond the Bounds and Measures of strict Duty? What

What a mighty Force has the Manner of Persons of Quality over their Inferiors, especially their Creatures, and Dependents? How apt are those, who follow them, to think it not only lawful, but commendable, blindly to espouse their Interests, and to give in to their criminal Designs and Measures? How many Temptations again, are Men expos'd to in their way of Commerce, and Dealing in the World? What Injuries, and disingenuous Tréatment must they expect to meet with at one time or other, to exercise their Patience and Charity? And how hard is it, when we are very ill us'd, to practise these Duties in their full Compass and Extent, or to stifle the very Motions of Revenge? How difficult is it also, under any great Disappointments, not to Envy the Success of other Persons, especially of those who have stood in our Way, or oppos'd our Designs.

All the Paths of Life are full of Snares; no Man can walk surely in them, but he that resolves to walk very *Uprightly*; he that observes every Step he takes, and regulates all the Motions of his Heart, and all the Actions of his Life, by the Laws of God, and the Regards of another World. To this end, are those Commands in Scripture, that we should *not be conform'd to this World*; that we should *have our Conversation in Heaven*; and *Ephes. v. 15.* that we should *walk Circumspectly, not as Fools, but Wise; redeeming the Time, because the Days are Evil.*

These two Considerations of the deprav'd State of our Nature, and the Snares of a corrupt World, were sufficient, one would think, to awaken our Care and Diligence, and keep us

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always upon our Guard, that *we may not enter into Temptation.* But there is still,

3dly, A very dangerous and powerful Enemy behind, who has been long vers'd in the Arts of Seducing Mankind. The Apostle, upon this Consideration, particularly charges us, to keep our Thoughts compos'd, and awake, *1 Pet. v. 8. 9. Be Sober, be Vigilant, because your Adversary, the Devil walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*

'Tis difficult to persuade some Persons, that Evil Spirits have directly or indirectly any Influence over the Minds of Men; and therefore by the Devil and the Tempter, so often mentioned in Scripture, they would understand nothing more than the Corruption of our own Hearts, and the natural Motions of Concupiscence arising from it.

But to all Persons, that believe the Scriptures, the very Text I have mentioned, and which cannot, with any Propriety, be explain'd in a Sense figurative or metaphorical wholly, is a sufficient Confutation of this Error; to which End therefore, I shall add but one Text more, and 'tis a very full and unanswerable one; wherein the Temptations of the Devil, and his Agents, are directly oppos'd to those of the Flesh, *Ephes. vj. 11. Put on the whole Armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the Wiles of the Devil; for we wrestle not against Flesh and Blood (not against them only) but against Principalities, against Powers, against the Rulers of the Darkeness of this World, against Spiritual Wickedness, or as it is in the Marginal Note of our Bibles, wicked Spirits in high Places.*

'Tis

'Tis no Objection against the Authority of Scripture in this Point, that we do not perceive, how these wicked Spirits can act upon our Minds; we, I say, who know so little of the Modification of our own Souls, or how they Operate upon our Bodies. The Soul Wills the Motion of the Arm, and the Arm moves; the Hand is wounded, and the Soul feels; the Eye takes in the Rays of Light, and the Soul sees: But what the Tye or Connection is, which unites these two Substances, so wholly distinct in their Nature and Properties, and causes them to act reciprocally upon one another, can never be accounted for upon any natural, or physical Grounds; much less is it any Argument against a reveal'd Truth, that we do not know the manner, how Spiritual Substances, *Substances* of the same kind, Operate upon one another.

Neither 2dly, Is it any Objection against the Devil's having a Power of Tempting us, that we do not distinctly perceive his Workings, from the Motions of our own Will and Affections. In all the Sins we commit, we seem to act freely, and follow our proper Inclinations; we are not sensible of any necessary Force, or Impulse, that is made upon our Minds.

But there is no Weight in what is here Objected, if we consider, that it seems very agreeable to Reason, and the Order of Things, that more noble and superior Beings, should have some kind of Power at least over Substances inferior to them; that the Devil being stiled the *Prince of this World*, and the *Prince of the Powers of the Air*, can, so far as the Reasons of Grace and Providence may permit, in some measure

measure direct or determin the Motions of Bodies; and that therefore, 'tis probable he does not immediately, at least not at all times, act upon the Soul, but only upon the Temperament of the Body, and the Scene of Imagination; which, as every Man perceives in himself, has so great an Influence to *defile the Heart*, and corrupt both Understanding and Will.

One Reason, why the Temper is so careful to conceal his acting upon us, so that we cannot distinguish it from our own proper volitions, is, that were we sensible of his Action, we should immediately start back and be fill'd with Horror at the Thoughts of it; or if notwithstanding we should still comply with his Temptations, our Compliance would in effect be a giving up our selves to him by a solemn and exprefs Compact: Upon this Supposition, no good Man could, and we can scarce imagine, that even the most wicked and profligate Sinners, would, hearken to his Suggestions.

And therefore to render his Temptations more effectual, this great Deceiver carries them on in such a manner, that while we are push'd forward by his Motions, we seem intirely to follow our own. The better to cover his Deceit, he observes our complexional Vices, and strikes in with those Passions, which are most predominant in us. Thus probably observing in *David*, a prevailing Temper of Ambition, 1 *Cor.* xxi. 1. he is expressely said to have stood up against *Israel*, and to have provok'd that Prince to number the People: Thus Covetousness, being the governing Temper of *Judas*, he is said, *John* xiiij. 2. to have put it into the Heart of that Apostle to betray his Lord; in
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all Probability, by representing and amplifying to him the Advantages of the promis'd Reward.

There is something of this Artifice of the Devil, very observable in the Temptation of our Blessed Lord himself; He had the same natural Appetites with other Men, and after he had fasted Forty Days and Forty Nights, might well be suppos'd to have had a strong Inclination to Eat; upon this Presumption, the Tempter moves him to declare himself to be the Son of God, in such a manner, as might at the same time gratify his Hunger. *If thou be the Son of God, command, that these Stones be made Bread.*

It is generally suppos'd by Divines, the Devil did not know, that the Divine Nature was personally united to the Human, in Jesus Christ. He knew however from the Circumstances of his Birth, that he was an extraordinary Person; and probably, that he was design'd for the Office of the *Messiah*. On the other Hand our Lord's Condition in the World appearing so very Mean and unsuitable to the Dignity of his Person, the Tempter thought again, nothing probably would operate more effectually upon him, than the Prospect of worldly Grandeur and Power, whereby he might be enabled to maintain his Port, and live up to the Eminency of his Character. To this End *he shews him all the Kingdoms of the Earth and the Glory of them.*

By the same artful Insinuations, the Devil, with his Evil Angels, still incessantly attempts to seduce Mankind, and to deceive, if it were possible, or if they have not a very watchful Eye upon his Designs, *even the Elect.*

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The Scriptures not only assure us of these Diabolical Powers and Arts, but they discover *themselves* in many Cases, by their Effects. 'Tis not to be conceiv'd, that so many Persons should reach such a high pitch of Wickedness and Impiety, upon the mere Stock of natural Corruption, if the Devil did not inoculate upon it; For notwithstanding the disorder'd State we are in, yet we still naturally retain some Love for Order, and are generally willing to submit to it, when it is not contrary to the Maxims of Self-love, to some end of Pleasure or Interest. Nay wicked Men themselves are sometimes willing to sacrifice a *small* Pleasure or Interest to the Love and Beauty of Order.

When therefore Men give themselves up to Impieties to which there is no visible Temptation of Pleasure or Interest, or when they commit those Sins, which are contrary to the powerful and common Obligations of Humanity; such as barbarous Acts of Malice and Revenge; of Violence and Oppression; of Uncharitableness to the Power, or base Returns of Ingratitude to their Friends and Benefactors; we ought even out of Respect to Human Nature in its depraved State to suppose, that Crimes of so high a Charge, proceed from the special Instigations of that Evil Spirit, *Which still works in the Children of Disobedience.*

But we are charitably to presume, there are few that believe in the Son of God, who was made manifest, that he might destroy the Works of the Devil, in whom this Evil Spirit operates with his full Force when we speak of Christians in general, we ought to hope better Things of them, and such as accompany Salvation. For
thank

thank God, the Powers of Darkneſs, with all their *Arts* of Deluſion, cannot hurt or ſeduce us, but thro' our own Default or Neglect; the Grace of God, whatever Snares they lay in our way, is ſtill ſufficient for us; *He that is in us, is greater than he that is in the World,* 1 John iv. 4.

I ſhall beg leave to add a Word or two by way of Explication, and ſo conclude. And,

1^{ſt}, What has been ſaid may be of Uſe and Inſtruction to the beſt of Men; to thoſe, who have made the greateſt Advances, in a Courſe of Piety and Virtue; for there is no State of Perfection in this Life: We are all upon Tryal, and expoſed to Temptations, from the beginning, to the laſt and concluding Scene of it. God indeed never with-holds his Grace from thoſe that lead a godly Life; but ſtill we ought not to preſume upon our own Strength. Let him that ſtandeth take heed leaſt he fall. 'Tis very obſervable, that theſe Words of my Text, were particularly directed to *Peter*. Our Lord knew, How confident this Diſciple was of his own Fidelity, and we all know how ſhamefully he was baffled and defeated, when it came to the Tryal; we are not, bleſſed be God, in a Chriſtian State in danger of being expoſed to the like Temptations, but the beſt of us muſt expect to meet with Temptations in one kind, or in one degree or other. Tho' we are not then in a ſinful, but a holy, and religious State; tho' we are not of the Night nor of Darkneſs, yet let us not ſleep as others, *but let us watch and be ſober.*

And yet I do not hereby intend as if the Life of a Chriſtian were one continu'd State of Penitance and rigorous Aſterities, no; there is a time

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time also for Rejoycing ; for unbending our Thoughts, and allowing our selves a greater Freedom in the innocent Delights and Entertainments of Human Life ; provided still, that we keep within the Bounds of Temperance and Moderation ; and because we do not know the exact Lines and Measures, where Virtue ends, and Vice begins, it will be prudent for us at all times, lest we exceed in our Liberties, to be rather upon the Reserve.

2dly, This Discourse may be of use to shew wicked Men the Necessity of hastening their Repentance and Conversion. If those that have made the greatest Proficiency in Religion, and whose Faces are set, as it were, towards *Sion*, are still sensible of a great many Frailties, and find the Seeds of Corruption will ever and anon be putting out afresh ; if it be so difficult to such advanc'd Christians, to keep themselves always upon their Guard, against the Attacks or Surprize of Temptation from a corrupt World, and the Powers of Darknes ; how much more does it concern those, who are engag'd in a wicked Course of Life, and the very Designs of their Enemies, to watch all Opportunities of renewing themselves again unto Repentance.

This is certain, and every Man that observes what passes within him, experiences the Truth of it, that the longer we continue under the Power of any sinful Passion, the more Ground it gains upon us, and we are at once the less able and the less willing to resist the Motions of it.

The sooner therefore we set our selves to this Duty of *Watchfulness*, in all the Respects I have mention'd, so much easier will the Practise of it, and the Victory over our Enemies be. On the other

other Hand, if thro' want of a virtuous Education, or from ill Examples and our own vitious Inclinations, we have been early drawn in to sinful Practises, and have still continu'd in them; If in the Spring and Vigour of Age, we have slept, and suffer'd the Enemy to Sow his Tares, and choak the good Seed, and Principles of Religion, then certainly we ought, nay we *must*, if ever we hope to recover our selves, double our Diligence, in rooting of them out, and applying our selves immediately to so necessary a Work without loss of time, and *while it is called to Day*.

For who knows how soon the Night may come on him, wherein he cannot Work; and which is at the best an improper Season for Business, sufficient for the Night, when we are alarm'd by the Approaches of Death, will be the Evil thereof; good Men who have spent their Days in the Service of God, will then have enough to do to bear the Disorders and Pains of Sickness; and to dye with a just Composure and Resignation of Mind.

What Confusion, what Distraction of Mind must an old habitual Sinner then be in, when the Pains of Hell take hold upon him? A Sinner, I say, who for a long time has liv'd in a wicked impenitent State of Life, and never thought of *Watching* or Standing upon his Guard, till the Enemy is got within his Quarters, and stands ready to seize him.

In a word, seeing we are all of us surrounded with so many Enemies; seeing the Time of Action is not only short, but very uncertain; let us watch all Opportunities, and take all Advantages of Improvement in Christian Virtue and Piety;

Piety; let us make it our constant Endeavour to adorn our selves with all the Graces and Beauties of our Holy Religion; to have our Lamps burning, and ready trim'd, against the coming of the Bridegroom, *lest coming suddenly, he find us Sleeping.*

Tho' in this Discourse I have principally apply'd my self to explain and enforce the Duty of Watchfulness, as a proper Means to preserve us from Temptation, yet I by no means intended to exclude the Necessity of Prayer to God for these Divine Assistances, without which all our Care and Caution will be ineffectual to this End.

I shall therefore conclude with one of the Excellent Collects of our Church. *O God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great Dangers, that by reason of the Frailty of our Natures, we cannot always stand upright, grant to us such Strength and Protection, as may support us in all Dangers, and carry us thro' all Temptations, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

SERMON IV.

The Duty of *Trust* in God, with respect to publick Communities, explain'd and enforc'd : A Sermon Preach'd on the Thanksgiving Day, Decemb. 3. 1702.

P S A L. CXviii. 8, 9.

It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in Man.

It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in Princes.

IT is readily acknowledg'd that God governs the World, and interposes in all the Affairs of it; yet this Principle has not those pious and general Effects that might be expected; how often do we promise our selves Success from Human Means and visible Preparations? Without taking a Divine Providence into the Account, or without attributing so much to it, as to our own Prudence, Address or Experience.

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To humble this Pride and Self-sufficiency in Man, God gave that Caution to the *Jews*; *Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, &c. least when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly Houses and dwelt therein, and when thy Herds and thy Flocks multiply, and thy Silver and Gold is multiply'd, and all that thou hast is multiply'd, then thine Heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, &c. and thou say in thine Heart, my Power, and the Might of mine Hand hath gotten me this Wealth,* Deut. 8. v. 11, 12, 13, 14, 17. by which is intimated to us, that when all things go smoothly on with us, and succeed to our Desires; when we flow in Wealth and Plenty, and our Eyes are fill'd with the visible Splendor and Advantages of our Condition, we are apt to bear our selves high upon it, and to leave out the principal Cause to which we owe all we have, and the Capacity we are in of having it continued to us.

Yet, tho' we are conscious to our selves of those many Frailties and Escapes, which are sufficient (if we duly reflect upon them) to take down the Wisest and Best of us; may we not more safely repose our Trust and Assurance in the known Abilities of other Men? especially of Men in Power and Authority, who have signaliz'd themselves to the World by their great and illustrious Actions, and thoroughly establish'd the Reputation of their Courage, their Conduct, and Fidelity; of Men who Command numerous Armies and powerful Fleets, and are attended with Success in all their Designs and Undertakings. Holy *David* was aware how much we are influenc'd both by a Sense of Gratitude and common Ingenuity in favour of such Persons; and

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and therefore takes occasion to turn our Thoughts upon that superior invisible Power, who has all the Hearts of Men, and Springs of Action in his Hand : *It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put Confidence in Man.*

But *Princes* who are invested with the Supreme Authority, who are distinguished in Scripture by the Name and Title of *Gods*, and are more immediately possessed of the visible Means and Instruments of Success : May we not with greater Confidence rely on their Conduct, for a prosperous and happy Event of Things ? especially when they come recommended to us by all those Qualifications which are proper to attract the Love and Esteem of their Subjects, and to render them Considerable abroad ; when they make the same Use of their Power with him that gave it, and live up to their Character by doing great, good and Godlike Actions ; by resisting the Proud, and asserting the natural Rights and Liberties of Mankind, against bold and arbitrary Invasions : In a word, when they have no separate Interests from their People, nor any higher Ambition than to make them happy ; may we not, I say, expect a glorious current of Success under the Administration of such Princes ? we have then indeed the best ground for our Expectations ; but yet we must intirely submit them to the Wisdom and Will of Heaven.

Among the Gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord, neither are there any Works like unto thy Works ; all Nations, whom thou hast made, shall come and Worship before thee, and shall glorify thy Name ; for thou art Great, and does wondrous Works, thou art God alone. Tho' God is pleas'd to dignify Princes more peculiarly with his own Name, as acting

by a more ample and diffus'd Authority, yet we are to look upon them only as Instruments in his Hand, which he can direct or restrain, or turn as he pleases.

So that the Confidence which holy *David* here tacitly Cautions us against, is to be understood, in opposition to the over-ruling Providence and Sovereignty of God; when we flatter our selves with those Expectations from secular Princes which are due only to the Power they represent.

And never perhaps was the Caution more seasonable than at this time, to moderate the Expressions of our Love and Gratitude to the greatest Princess upon Earth: Amidst all the happy and joyful Effects of Her Administration at home, and the glorious Success of Her Arms abroad, let us ascribe to God the Honour due unto his Name; let us remember, that 'tis he who directs her Counsels, and fights her Battels. We ought not to be so far transported with the Honour of a Campaign, and Naval Expedition, which will give *England* a new Figure in foreign and future History, as to forget the advice of the *Royal Prophet* in my Text, who himself wanted no personal Qualifications, or external Advantages to support his Character; nay, who possess'd them both in a very high and uncommon degree; yet thought fit to remind himself and us, *That it is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in Princes.*

In discoursing upon the Words, I shall observe this Method,

First, I shall explain wherein the religious Trust here recommended, does consist.

Secondly,

Secondly, I shall use some Motives and Arguments to enforce it, and under both these Heads shall have an Eye to the present Occasion.

And First, The religious Trust here recommended, implies an humble Belief that all Things, by God's Blessing, will succeed well with us, in the use of human and lawful Means, and a due regard to the Laws of Religion in general. This definition, I think, takes in all those Particulars which are requisite to give us a right Notion of the Duty of my Text, and I shall speak severally to them.

First, This Duty implies an humble Belief, that all Things, by God's Blessing, will succeed well with us; by which, I do not mean, that every thing should exactly correspond to our Desires, or the probability of second Causes; but that upon the whole Matter, God will appear for us, and Interest himself in our Favour. We see but a little way upon the Chain of Providence: Our Prospect is bounded by the first Accident which may be supposed to intervene; but God has at once a perfect Knowledge of all possible Contingencies; of the entire Connection and remotest Consequences of Things; and upon this View, he often effects the Ends of his Providence by such Ways and Means as are not to be examin'd by our narrow Conception of Things, and the Measures of human Prudence: 'Tis in this Sense, those Words of the Apostle are to be explain'd, *the foolishness of God is wiser than Men, and the weakness of God is stronger than Men*, 1 Cor. 1. 25. *i. e.* Those Methods of Divine Providence, which appear to us Strange
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and Unaccountable, according to the Judgment we form of the general course and tendency of Things, are yet much better contriv'd, in order to attain their End, than all the Wit or Policy of Man could have thought of.

For after all our Care and Precaution, a great part of the Good or Evil, which befalls us in this World, is owing to what we call Casual Hits, and unseen Accidents; this *Solomon* long since observ'd, and his Observation is confirm'd by the Experience of all Mankind, *That the Race is not to the Swift, nor the Battle to the Strong, nor yet Bread to the Wise, nor yet Riches to Men of Understanding, nor yet Favour to Men of Skill; what is so likely to overcome in a Race, as Swiftness; or in a Battle, as Strength; who are in a readier way to Wealth, than Men of Reach, and Dispatch in Business; or to Preferment, than Persons of an artful and insinuating Address?* and yet nothing is more evident, than that Things do not always fall out in these respects, according to the most proper and probable Causes, *but Time and Chance happen to all*; that is, there are now and then some certain Seasons and favourable Junctures, which are more Instrumental to the Success of our Designs, than all human and visible Means of effecting them.

Seeing therefore what we call accidental Events, fall only within the compass of the *Divine Foreknowledge*, and that the Fortune, I do not say of private Persons or Families, but of whole Fleets, and Armies, and Empires, does sometimes turn upon them: The wisest Method we can take, in order to a happy Event of our Affairs, is entirely to repose our Trust and Confidence in the Wisdom of God; and even, if Things
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for a time go cross to our Hopes and Expectations, not to give our selves up to Impatience, and a Criminal Distrust ; but to hope well, that some good Providence is still making towards us, tho' by such ways as we cannot perhaps, at present account for.

There is something to this purpose worth our Observation, on the occasion of our Meeting here: No doubt the late Design against *Cadiz*, was form'd upon the nicest Measures of human Wisdom and Policy, and we wanted not those Probabilities of Success, that we began to talk of it with an Air of Assurance; but God was pleas'd to blast and defeat our Hopes of that Expedition ; and yet the same Fleet, and Army that were employ'd in it, had not, many Days after, a favourable and unexpected Opportunity of obtaining one of the most glorious and compleat Victories, which History Records: A Victory which probably will redound more to our Advantage, and the Loss and Disgrace of the common Enemy, than if we had succeeded in our first Enterprize.

Thus is God Almighty pleas'd to abate our Pride, and establish in our Minds a more awful Sense of his Providence; to bring to nought our best form'd Schemes and Designs, and to Interest himself for us in a surprizing and notorious manner. *Who knoweth not in all these the Hand of the Lord hath wrought this; in whose Hand is the Soul of every Thing, and the Breath of all Mankind; with him is Wisdom and Strength, he hath Counsel and Understanding, he pouereth Contempt upon Princes, and Weaketh the Strength of the Mighty; he discovereth deep Things out of Darkness, and bringeth to Light the Shadow of Death: He in-*

creaseth the Nations, and destroyeth them; he enlargeth the Nations, and streightneth them again, Job 12, 9, 10, 13, 21, 22, 23.

If then we cannot always solve the Difficulties which arise, from the Methods of Divine Providence towards us, or our Enemies; yet let this be the constant support of our Trust and Dependance on God, that he has wise and good Reasons, tho' unknown to us, for what he does; and that they would appear so to us, had we as full and comprehensive a Knowledge of all Accidents and Events, as he himself, *Tho' his Paths are in the Waters, and his Judgments as the great Deep, yet we are assured, his Righteousness standeth fast as the strong Mountains.*

2dly, In order to a well-grounded Trust in God, human Means and Endeavours must not be wanting: In the ordinary course of Things, God does not interpose by an immediate miraculous Power; and therefore we are to make use of all those opportunities he has put into our Hands, of promoting the publick Happiness and Tranquility: In Cases indeed of Extremity, when all human and ordinary Supports fail, God has been pleas'd in a more remarkable manner to make bare his Arm in favour of a Nation or People; particularly in all the Wars of *Israel* with the *Canaanites*, he so visibly went forth with their Armies, that they could not but be sensible, it was not their own Strength or Numbers, but his Right Hand that got them the Victory, and gave them Possession of the Promis'd Land. The Hopes of this special Support and Protection of Heaven, put *Jonathan* upon that brave and heroick Resolution, *1 Sam. 14. 6. Come and let us go over unto the Garrison of the Uncircumcised, it may be that the Lord will*

will work for us, for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many, or by few. What a noble Instance is here of greatness of Spirit, and of the Power and Efficacy of Faith; two single Persons form a Design of forcing a whole Camp, and succeed in the Attempt, notwithstanding the insuperable Difficulties and Dangers, which in all Appearance attended it. Innumerable Instances might be produc'd out of profane Writ, wherein God Almighty has turn'd the Advantage of a Battel, on the side of very unequal Preparations, and disproportionate Numbers; and that either by striking an unaccountable Terror into the Hearts of the Enemy, or by some extraordinary Accident upon the Death of a General, and even sometimes by a sudden and unexpected Change of the Season. *Making the Wind and Storm to fulfil his Word.*

This is an Encouragement to those, whose Trust in the Divine Goodness is well supported, not to despond, tho' their Affairs seem to be at the lowest Ebb, and they have no visible Prospect of Deliverance; for tho' God makes use of natural Causes to produce their proper, and probable Effects, yet his Power and Providence are not confin'd to his ordinary ways of acting in the World; he that made all Things, can either suspend or restrain their Influences; or give greater Force and Efficacy to them, as he sees fit: But on the other Hand, when he affords us the Instruments of our own Security and Happiness (as he has done particularly to this Nation in a more liberal Measure, than perhaps to any other under Heaven,) he expects we should make use of these Advantages, and not tempt him by a lazy and presumptuous Reliance

nance on such extraordinary Interpositions of his Providence ; and to this End, no doubt, the Example of the Pious *Nehemiah*, is Recorded, *Chap. 4. 9.* Who at the same time he pray'd to God, for Protection against his Enemies disposed the *Jews* under his Command in Military Order, and neglected not the ordinary Means of Defence, and Preservation.

But 3dly, In the Use of Human Means, we must take care not to have recourse to such as are unlawful, we cannot expect the Providence of God should give a Blessing to those Counsels and Designs, which are in effect a tacit denial of it ; how can we reconcile it either with a common Sense of Piety or Prudence, to acknowledge that all Things come to pass by the Will of Heaven, and at the same time knowingly, and deliberately to act in Opposition to it.

Let us hear how God himself expresses his Resentments of such indirect, and sinister Methods, *Isa. xxx. 1, 23.* *Wo, says he, to the rebellious Children that take Counsel, but not of me, &c. that walk to go down to Ægypt, and have not asked at my Mouth to strengthen themselves in the Strength of Pharoah, and to trust in the Shadow of Ægypt, therefore shall the Strength of Pharoah be your Shame, and the trust in the Shadow of Ægypt your Confusion :* God here threatens, (and it generally proves so) that those impious Counsels, wherein Men hope to find their Account, shall turn to their own Ruin and Disgrace, and bring upon them those very Evils, they endeavour'd to prevent by them. When *Job* puts the Question to his Friends, *Chap. xiii. 7.* *will you speak wickedly for God, and talk deceitfully for him, he does it by way of a more vehement Affirmation,*
that

that we ought to abhor the thoughts of defending the Honour of Religion it self, the greatest and noblest and dearest Interest of all, by wicked and irreligious Means, much less may we do evil upon inferiour Motives, or that any other good in the World besides, may come of it.

No, we can never hope God will stand by us when we go further, than he has commission'd us; he has only promis'd to give a Blessing to our Counsels and Endeavours, when we regulate them by his Laws, and here his Promises are very full, and particular. *Trust in the Lord, and do good, so shall thou dwell in the Land, Psal. xxxvij. 9. The Salvation of the Righteous is of the Lord, he is their Strength in time of Trouble: And Prov. xvi. 3. Commit thy Works unto the Lord, and thy Thoughts shall be established.* And again, *Chap. xviii. 10. The Name of the Lord is a strong Tower, the Righteous runneth into it, and is safe.* The plain Meaning of all which is, that we have no Ground to hope God will interpose in our Behalf, while the Measures, we go upon, are not conformable to his Will.

So that I can never think those Words of our Saviour, *Be ye wise as Serpents, and harmless as Doves*; were design'd only for the first Disciples of our Lord; for tho' they were spoken on a particular Occasion to them, yet they indifferently extend to all Distinctions of Men professing Christianity, and especially to those in the highest Posts of Trust and Honour; as they stand in need of a more special Providence and Protection of Heaven: And as an honest, conscientious Practice is necessary to intitle them to it.

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While we do what is agreeable to the Laws of Heaven, we are safe; and God will either give Success to our Designs (if we want no other Qualification to recommend them to his Favour) or has wise Reasons, tho' he does not think fit to let us into them, why they should not succeed; but while we use any indirect Means to prevent a Danger, which we apprehend making towards us, we take the most ready Course to bring it, with a Vengeance, upon us; God usually turns our Counsels, as he did those of *Achitophel* into Foolishness, and disappoints our Devices, so that we are not able to perform: Or if for a Turn we bring our Designs to bear, he usually takes a Time to meet with us in the Course of his future Providence. For *there is no Wisdom, nor Understanding, nor Counsel against the Lord.* That command to the Kings of Israel upon their Accession to the Crown, is very observable to this Purpose. *Deut. xvij. 18, 19. And it shall be when he sitteth upon the Throne of his Kingdom, that he shall write him a Copy of this Law in a Book, &c. And he shall Read therein all the Days of his Life, that he may serve the Lord his God, to keep all the Words of this Law, and these Statutes to do them, that he turn not aside from the Commandment, to the Right-hand nor to the Left: (Upon any vitious Motive, or Pretence whatever) to the end, he may prolong his Days in his Kingdom, and his Children in the midst of Israel.* The meaning of which Precept, and of the special Promise annex'd to it, I take to be this; That the Laws of God are the best Instrument of Civil Government; and that Piety in the final Issue, and Event of Things, will prove the truest Policy, and lay the most firm and durable Foundation

dation of the Princes Grandeur, and the Peoples Prosperity.

Yet I am sensible such Religious Maxims as I have been inculcating, will not easily (at least, Universally) be admitted by Politicians: The only settled Principle of many of those, who go under that Name, is to have none at all, but to strike in with every favourable Juncture, to take their Measures from Human Accidents, and Emergencies, without troubling their Heads with pedantick Niceties, and Distinctions of Religion.

Not but that Princes stand in need of all imaginable Precautions, and Men of the greatest Dexterity, and Penetration about them; yet there is Scope enough for Ministers of State to distinguish themselves, and discover their Abilities while they govern their Conduct by the Law of Heaven.

Notwithstanding this, if we look abroad into the World, we shall find that Religion is not always thought a State-vertue; and that the Actions of those, who have presided at the Helm of Government, are not to be examin'd nicely by the Rules of Morality; but we ought not to forbear them on that Account; for tho' Politicks are not the Business of Church-men, yet I am sure Religion and Morality are *in the full Compass of them*; and what I have said has been only in general to shew, that Reasons of State do not alter the Nature of Things, or destroy the settled, and natural Distinction of Right and Wrong, but ought always to be regulated by the Law of God.

And this is what Church-men ought to stand to, and maintain against all Men living; especially

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cially in an Age, where almost every Man sets up for a Politician; and almost every Politician, takes *Machiavel* for his Model: Who should appear for the Cause of Religion and Morality, when they are so generally attack'd, if those of our Character and Function do not? 'Tis expected from us, that we should; and I will make no Apology for it.

But 4thly, the main Foundation of our religious Trust, upon which all the forementioned Qualifications of it are supported, is a due regard to the Laws of God, and Religion in general. 'Tis a great Felicity when those, who are concern'd in the publick Administration, act at once upon prudential and pious Motives; and it may be own'd, to Her Majesty's Honour, that the Choice of Persons to serve Her, has been agreeable to the Resolutions She has taken, and that She has a nice regard to the known Integrity, as well as Abilities of those, she employs.

But after all, 'tis only the Righteousness of a People considered as a Nation, that can give them a sure and firm Anchor of Hope in the Divine Providence, and this will do it: For tho' God Almighty is sometimes pleas'd to take occasion, from the notorious Sins and Impieties of a Prince, to punish a wicked People; yet when he speaks of the settled Order and Methods of his Providence, he directs himself to publick Bodies and Communities of Men, *Jer. 18, 7, 8, 9, 10. At what instant, I shall speak concerning a Nation, and concerning a Kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it: If that Nation against whom I have pronounc'd, turn from their Evil; I will repent of the Evil that I thought to do*
unto

unto them; and at what Instant I shall speak concerning a Nation, and concerning a Kingdom, to Build and to Plant it; if it do Evil in my sight, that it obey not my Voice, then I will repent of the Good, wherewith I said I would Benefit them.

And this Declaration of God, after what manner he would deal with a religious or wicked People, explains to us the Nature and Import of the Prophet's Commission, chap. I. 10. *I have this Day set thee over the Nations, and over the Kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy and to throw down, and to build and to Plant: Not as if the Prophet were design'd to lead powerful and numerous Armies, or to go upon any of these Expeditions in his own Person, but that he should lay down such excellent Rules and Maxims as a Nation, by duly observing, should raise it self to the highest pitch of Grandeur and Glory; and on the other hand, by not attending to, should proportionably sink, and depress itself; but this was more especially in the Prophet's Charge, with respect to the Jews. Thus chap. 6. 8. God calls upon them in particular, to hearken in time to his wise Counsels and Admonitions; be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my Soul depart from thee, lest I make thee desolate, a Land not inhabited; in which Words, there are these two Things observable: First, That the Sins of a Nation in general, are the proper and meritorious Cause of God's punishing it. Secondly, That Religion is a sure Means to recommend us to the Care and Favour of Heaven: Lest my Soul depart from thee, implies, That if now at last, when Things were brought to Extremity, they would attend to the Prophet's Instructions, God would still continue his*
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Protection to them, and suspend the threatened Punishment.

I might make appear at large, from the *Jewish* History, that God, in the Methods of his Punishing or Prospering that People, had all along regard to their Sins or Repentance: 'Till after they had run on for many Years, in a continued Circle of Sinning and Repenting, of Repenting and Sinning, and the Patience of God would no longer bear with them; he first delivered the Ten Tribes into the Hands of the *Assyrians*, who carry'd them away Captive, and 'tis not known to this Day, what became of them: And *Judah* not being admonish'd by such a remarkable Example of the Divine Vengeance on a sinful Nation, but afterwards Revolting, provok'd God to inflict that severe Threat, *2 Kings* 23, 27. *I will remove Judah also out of my Sight, as I have done Israel; and I will cast off this City Jerusalem, which I have chosen, and the House of which I said my Name shall be there.* The special and distinguishing Favours of Heaven towards that People, instead of Protecting them from the Divine Justice, are rather mention'd as an aggravation of their Crime and their Punishment; accordingly, after their succeeding Kings were either Slain, or Depos'd, or taken Captive, and as it is express'd *2 Chron.* 36, 16. God saw there was no Remedy or Hopes of reclaiming them, *Jerusalem is again besieged, and delivered into the hands of Nebuchadnezar: And King Zedechias, after having his Eyes put out, is carried in Chains unto Babylon, none of his People being suffer'd to remain behind him but the very Dregs and Refuse of them: And after their return from the Babylonish Captivity, when at last they had*
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fill'd up the Measure of their Iniquity, by Rejecting and Crucifying the Lord of Life; their City and Temple were finally destroy'd by the *Romans*, and they were never able to form themselves from that time, into any regular Government, tho' they after attempted it; but have liv'd scatter'd up and down in all Places where they could find Protection, and are generally at this Day, the most hated and despis'd People upon Earth.

Thus was the forecited Prophecy fulfill'd in the most literal Sense, and remarkable manner upon them, *and God made them a People desolate, a Land not inhabited.*

And the Justice of God's proceeding herein, does not only appear from Divine Revelation, but seems to be founded in the common Sense and Reason of Mankind; who have generally had a Notion, when any publick Calamity befell them, that they had provok'd the Anger of their Gods, by some notorious Crimes; for which reason they had recourse to so many ways of Purgation and Atonement: And what I here observ'd, concerning the general Apprehensions of Men, in this Matter, is confirm'd by that Commination of God himself to the People of Judah, Jer. xxij. 8, 9. *Many Nations shall pass by this City, and they shall say every Man to his Neighbour, Wherefore hath the Lord done this, unto this great City? And they shall answer, Because they have forsaken the Covenant of the Lord their God, and worship'd other Gods, and served them; implying, that the Justice of Divine Providence, in this respect, is visible and obvious to all Mankind; and that the most barbarous People, when God inflicts*

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his publick Judgments upon a Nation, are able to assign the *Reasons* of them.

I wish the prevailing Sins and Impieties of this Nation, gave me no Ground for these Reflections; it cannot be dissembled, that there is a general Corruption and Apostacy of Manners among us: This is an insufferable Reproach to us, when we consider our selves as Christians, and particularly as Christians *Reform'd*: But to comfort us under these Apprehensions, never was Religion better Explain'd, or Understood; never had we brighter Examples of a solid unaffected Piety; never had we a greater number of truly religious Persons to stand in the Gap, to turn away the Divine Indignation from us: 'Tis to be hop'd, that the Authority, exemplary Zeal, and Encouragement of Her Majesty, for promoting a general Reformation, and Her fix'd Resolution to make Virtue and Merit the only Recommendations to Her Favour, will in time produce this happy and desirable Effect. There seems indeed, a general Concurrence of all Sorts and Distinctions of Men to so good a Work; and, by God's Blessing, their Endeavours have not been hitherto without Success: This opens to us a new and more joyful prospect of Things, and gives us better Grounds to hope, that our Iniquities, tho' God knows, too spreading and notorious, yet are not still such as will separate betwixt him and us, and then we are sure nothing else can.

Having thus consider'd, particularly and at large, wherein the Nature of this Duty of trusting in God, as it relates to us in our publick Capacity, does consist; I proceed, according to
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to the Method propos'd, to offer some proper Motives and Arguments to enforce it. And that,

First, Because there is nothing but God wherein we can place an intire Trust and Confidence; this appears from what has been occasionally said already, but we cannot be too often reminded of it, when we consider how forward we are, after all, to rely on our own Politicks, and the Power and Efficacy of Second Causes. The good State of our Fleets and Armies, the Conduct of our Generals, the Integrity and Abilities of our Ministers, the Number and Importance of our Alliances, are usually the first Things that come into Consideration; and we were never under a greater Temptation to presume of Success than now, in all these respects; but yet if we leave God out of the Account, they all signify nothing: We are sensible that the wisest of Men may deceive us, and be deceived themselves, and many times the greatest Power cannot help us; but God perfectly knows the propriety of Causes to produce future Events, and can effectually apply them: All things fall within the compass of his Knowledge and Will, and of his alone. *He is wise in Heart, and mighty in Strength*, Job ix. 4. He pierces through the whole Creation and Order of Things, at one Look, and has all the Powers of Motion intirely at his Command; He comprehends and does every thing. We take our Measures from what suits with our present Interest, or Convenience; at best, from the most probable Appearances of Things, and upon this View we earnestly desire and pursue them; but they often draw a Train of unhappy Consequences after them, which we

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did not foresee, and cannot prevent ; Foresight, and prevention of remote Contingencies, are the Prerogative of God, and therefore he alone ought to be the supreme Object of our Trust : When we lean to our own Understanding, or the Arm of Flesh, we fall upon those very things we expect should support us : As 'tis our Duty, so 'tis also the safest way for us to take God into all our Designs and Consultations, to refer the Issue of them wholly to his Wisdom, and to confide in his Power alone for Success. *He doth according to his Will in the Armies of Heaven, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth, and none may stay his Hand, or say unto him, what dost thou ?*

A second Motive to this Duty shall be taken from the Nature of it ; as it is the highest and noblest act of religious Honour, the most sensible Acknowledgment of the eternal Power and Godhead. And for this reason, so many and particular Promises are every where in Scripture annex'd to it ; and God has as remarkable on all occasions made them good, *Pf. xxxvij. 40. holy David ascribes the deliverance of good Men to their Trust in God, as it were to a meritorious Cause, and the Lord shall help them, and deliver them from the wicked, and shall save them, because they put their Trust in him ; and 2 Chron. xij 18. this is assign'd as the peculiar reason of the Success of Judah against Israel, thus the Children of Israel were brought under at that time, and the Children of Judah prevailed, because they rely'd on the Lord God of their Fathers : And indeed there is nothing lays a greater Obligation upon ingenuous Minds (or whereby they think themselves more honour'd) than the reposing an intire Trust*
and

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and Confidence in them : All Mankind are of this Opinion, and God, when he condescends to Personate a Father, or a Friend, is pleas'd to accommodate himself to the natural Passions and Apprehensions of Men, arising from these Relations; so that upon this Supposition, that God governs the World, to place a generous and stedfast dependance on him, seems to be at once the most honorary and most engaging act of Religion : On the contrary, God expresses himself against those, who entertain unworthy and suspicious Thoughts of his Providence in such Terms, as are us'd to discover his highest Indignation, and the most provoking Guilt, *Jer. xvij. 5. Thus saith the Lord, Cursed be the Man who trusteth in Man, and maketh Flesh his Arm, and whose Heart departeth from God :* As if to repose our Trust in any thing but God, were in effect to deny, that he concerns himself with what is done in the World, or that his Concurrence is necessary, in order to the Success of our Designs.

I shall but urge one Motive more to this Duty, and that is, from our present Circumstances. We are now engag'd in a War for the Defence of the common Liberties of *Europe*, against a very powerful Enemy; an Enemy, as great in his Character of a Politician, as a Prince. And if we do believe, that God does at all interest himself in the Affairs of the World, we must look upon those, who are engag'd in a State of War, as the more special and immediate Objects of his Providence; and there are two very plain and obvious Reasons for this.

First, That the Blessings or Evils of this Life, which are the principal Things the Providence of God is conversant and employ'd about, do more visibly depend upon the Success and Event of War, than upon any thing besides.

Second, That War being as it were a referring those Controversies to the Decision of Heaven, which cannot otherwise be determined among Secular Princes, especially when their Ambition knows no Bounds, and they think themselves no longer oblig'd by the most solemn Treaties, than they can violate them with Safety and Impunity: In these Cases, I say, God, for the vindication of his Honour and Justice, seems more peculiarly concerned to take the Matter into his Hand, and to determin himself in favour of the Injured, and just Cause: Not that I think Success, an Argument of a good Cause, we know it very often attends a bad one; but the Reason of this is not to be imputed to the Nature of the Cause, but to other accidental Considerations: A good Cause may want those requisite Qualifications wherewith it ought to be supported; and God may take occasion from the Sins and Impieties of a Nation, to punish it by what Methods he pleases; and he often makes one wicked Nation the Instrument of his Vengeance upon another; without any respect to the Justice or Unlawfulness of the War on either side: This he plainly gives us to understand himself, in that Caution to the Jews, Deut. ix. 4, 5, 6. *That they should not attribute their Success in the Land of Canaan to their own Righteousness, but to the Wickedness of them that dwell therein.*

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But tho' Success, consider'd in it self, is a very bad Argument of a good Cause; yet a good Cause is indispensibly requisite to ground our Hopes of Success upon. • Our Sins and Provocations may render it unsuccessful, yet we cannot hope for the Blessing of God without it. In short, whenever it appears necessary that we should enter into a War, we ought in the first Place to come to that pious Resolution of our Royal Prophet, *In the name of the Lord we will set up our Banners*, Ps. xx. 5. But then besides the Justice of our Cause, if we would effectually recommend it to the Favour and Protection of Heaven, we must take care not to offend God, by our wicked Lives; *when the Host goeth forth against the Enemy, then, that is, particularly at that time, keep thy self from every wicked thing*, Deut. xxij. 29. 'Tis only a righteous People can depend upon the Success of a righteous Cause, and they may depend upon it.

And yet whatever hopes there may be of a general Reformation, as to the publick Immortalities and Profaneness of the Age, there is but little appearance of our reforming one wicked thing among us, which we have reason to fear is highly displeasing to God, and that is our want of Union. I speak not here of those Civil Factions and Animosities, which we have so often experienc'd the ill effects of, never had we less reason to lament them, than under the Reign of Queen ANNE; it is Her peculiar Glory, that we have now no State-Distinctions among us, but seem all to have one Interest, and one Heart, like Her own, *Intirely English*; even those whose Unhappiness it is, that they cannot conform to the present Establishment,

will own the Difficulties they are under to oppose their Principles to their Inclination ; but 'tis to be hop'd, their secret Wishes for the publick Good, will in time induce them to consider the unreasonableness of their private Doubts, and their known Honour and Veneration for Her Majesty's Person, makes way for the effectual removal of their Prejudices against Her Title ; and can we be happier than under such a Government, where those that conform, are unanimously its Friends, and these inconsiderable Few that do not, cannot be look'd upon as Enemies.

Oh ! then that we may never be reduc'd to that unhappy Temper of fomenting Parties, and calling Names ; we know of what ill Consequence these publick Feuds and Clashings have been to us ; 'tis not long since they set the Nation almost in a Flame. But since we now understand our Interest, and the Character of those worthy Patriots better, who were so notoriously and malevolently traduc'd ; may these scandalous Disorders never be mentioned more ; and I had not mentioned them now, but to shew how *Intirely* Her Majesty is possess'd of the Hearts of Her Subjects : No sooner did She ascend the Throne, but that Spirit of Enmity and Discord which was gone out into the Nation, seem'd all of a sudden to vanish ; and the only Emulation among us was, which of us should give Her Majesty the greatest Assurances of our Love and Loyalty, in our publick Addresses.

But what I had here principally an Eye to, are our numerous Divisions with respect to Religion ; so contrary to the Spirit and Design of
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stianity, so irreconcilable (whatever Men pretend) with a true Sense of Piety, and hearty Desire of Peace; I know it is said, there may be Unity among Christians, according to the Gospel-Terms of it, without Communion of Faith or Worship: This, in some respect, is true; there may be (tho' this not very common neither) an unity of Love, and Charity among Persons of different Persuasions, but the Difficulty is not hereby remov'd; because the Unity which the Gospel so frequently recommends, does not only import mutual Love and Charity among Christians, but Communion of Faith and Worship too: So that this Argument, were it well grounded, would be a greater Objection against the Christian Religion, than our Divisions themselves; as it proceeds upon this Supposition, that the Gospel-Terms of Communion, and the Precepts of the Gospel, are inconsistent one with another, which is an Objection I leave those to answer, who have given occasion for it.

It must be own'd then, that our many and publick Divisions, wherever the Fault lies, are just and provoking Causes of God's Judgments upon us; 'tis not my Business to enter into Controversy, and therefore I only exhibit a general Charge, against all those who are in a State of *Schism*, and wish they would impartially examin how far they are concern'd in such a Charge; and then 'tis to be hop'd, an end would speedily be put to our Controversies, and we should be more perfectly join'd together in the same Mind, and in the same Judgment. Let us especially, who are Members of the Church of *England*, take care to conform
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our Practice to the Rules and Constitutions of it, and be perfectly united among our selves; I mention this, because there are some, upon occasion among us, who are not of us; who communicate with us, in order to qualify themselves for Places of Trust or Profit, and then Rail at the Terms of our Communion when they have done; who take the Test of Conformity out of Interest, and then pretend Conscience for not Conforming.

Now I dare appeal to the more sober and moderate Dissenters themselves, whether in their Hearts they do not abhor such indirect and scandalous Practices: For whoever conforms to our Church, upon any such Motive, must either in effect own himself an *Atheist*, or confess that the Terms of Conformity are Lawful; and if they be Lawful; then, I think, as to the Point of Expediency, 'tis a clear Case, that mutual Peace and Charity will be much better preserv'd by conforming to the Establish'd Church, than by separating from it: And I know nothing in the Question of *Expediency*, which we ought to have a greater regard to, than these Duties. But I say no more to a Practice so dishonourable to Religion; which our Governours in their great Wisdom, have taken into Consideration, and may they effectually prevent it for the future: Perhaps it were better, that communicating with us, were not made a Condition to qualify Men for Civil Offices, than that they should be suffer'd to prostitute Religion, after such an infamous manner, in order to qualify themselves for them.

And now that I have mention'd the Church of *England*, I cannot but Congratulate with you

you our Happiness in a Queen, so Religiously in the Interest of it ; Her Constancy to it was too well supported, to be shaken in the worst of Times: But since Her happy Accession to the Crown, She has been pleas'd to give us publick Assurances of that Zeal for it, which Her Heart was always full of ; and yet Her Gracious Expressions towards us, are temper'd with so much Moderation and Tenderness for Her People in general, that they cannot offend those who dissent from us ; and therefore we all ought to Unite in our Prayers for Her, that God would send Her a long and happy Reign, answerable to these auspicious Beginnings ; that he would give Success to our Armies, and Security to our Trade, and Peace, and Plenty, and a good Understanding among our selves ; and to Crown all our Desires, That he would bless Her Majesty with an Heir, that may raise in us as great Expectations, as His late Royal Highness the Duke of *Gloucester*, and live to answer them.

Here I am sensible I have excited a Passion unsuitable to the Occasion of the Day ; but to allay our Sorrows for the Death of that Illustrious Prince, let us, among the numerous Mercies we are met to commemorate, offer up our joyful Praises to Heaven, for the Recovery of his Father ; we cannot forget, with what a Consternation we were seiz'd, upon Advice of the Danger his Royal Highness was in ; 'twas the first time the Subjects of Queen *Anne* discover'd their Fears ; but withal gave them an Opportunity of shewing the great Sense they had of his noble and heroic Qualifications, of his prudent and obliging Conduct, of his great
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Temper and Moderation, which have render'd him the best lov'd Man in the World, and the fittest Person to be the Partner of Her Majesty's Cares and Counsels : This ought to remove the only seeming Occasion of Complaint, that he does not go forth with our Fleets and Armies ; Her Majesty cannot think of his Absence, nor of those Dangers his known Courage and Bravery might expose him to ; and he willingly Sacrifices the Opportunities of a Glory to Her Pleasure. Long may they live, to be Examples to Foreign Courts, and to all about them, of that inviolable conjugal Love and Affection, which we have but few Instances of, among Persons of their Character, or of the first Distinction.

Neither must we omit to pay our Acknowledgments in general, to all those who are concern'd in the present Administration of Affairs, which have succeeded so well, and even beyond our Expectations.

But particularly those who have been honoured with Her Majesty's Commands abroad, Challenge the highest returns of our Gratitude and Respect. The publick Acknowledgments that have been made our great Captain General, the Earl of *Marlborough*, both by the Queen and Her Parliament, declared how sensible they were of the numerous and signal Services he has done *England*, and Her Allies, in one Campaign, against the United Powers of the two Aspiring, *Western Monarchies*.

Nor has Her Majesty (for the Encouragement of Merit) omitted to make honourable Mention in Her Royal Proclamation of those other Worthies, who Commanded our Forces in that brave
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and gallant Action before *Vigo*; so much for the Nations Honour, and their own.

Long may Queen *Anne* be happy in such heroick Generals, and in a wise, faithful, and able Ministry: Long may she live to receive the Congratulations of a loyal and loving People: And let us *Trust in the Lord*, for 'tis Her own Wish, that we may have frequent Occasions of renewing them.

S E R

SERMON V.

To what End it is a Duty incumbent on us to hear Sermons; with the Means, whereby this Duty may be rendred more Edifying and Beneficial to us.

JAMES i. 22.

But be ye Doers of the Word, and not Hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

THE Design of all Instruction is, either to enlighten the Mind, or to move the Will and Affections. Men, whose Hearts are very corrupt, do frequently taste a Pleasure that Charms them, in complying with the former of these Designs; and even sometimes in contemplating those Truths, which most of all oppose their Inclinations: As the Eye, when any vicious Humour falls upon it, yet cannot

not easily forbear opening it self to the Light, which it loves, tho' in some measure Painful and Offensive to it.

It is therefore no extraordinary thing to observe Men pretty forward in repairing to the Place of God's Worship, to hear a Sermon; upon whose Lives Religion has, notwithstanding no visible Influence: The truth of it is, few Persons being so wicked as to think of living wholly without God in the World, or of laying aside all care of Serving him; they are easily persuaded to offer him a Sacrifice, which has some Appearance at least of Piety in it, and at the same time costs them nothing; but rather tends to gratifie a secret Motion of Self-love, and that Natural Thirst of the Soul after Knowledge, which the most Stupid and Profligate Sinners, cannot wholly Suppress: If there be not perhaps some Men, who design little more hereby, than a Sacrifice to their own Pride or Arrogance; when they consider themselves for so long a time sitting upon the Preacher in the Capacity of Judges; and as having a Right to determine how he comes off.

I would not hereby discourage the greatest Sinners from hearing of Sermons, but only direct them to perform this Duty, on better and more religious Motives; tho' indeed upon what Motives soever we repair to perform it, if the good Seed of the Word do not spring up in us to bear Fruit, we only Act a more solemn Part of Desembling before God, and chusing *our own Delusion*: It is this very Consideration wherewith St. *James* enforces what he had laid down in the former part of my Text, as a general Rule and Caution to all Christians.

But,

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But, be ye Doers of the Word, and not Hearers only, *deceiving* your own selves.

In Discoursing upon which Words, I shall observe this plain and easy Method.

1st. I shall consider it as a Duty incumbent on us to hear Sermons, in order to our Instruction; for I wholly confine my self at present to this Acceptation of our hearing the Word of God.

2^{dly}. I shall shew, that one great End of our hearing Sermons; is to form and regulate our Practise.

3^{dly}. I shall lay down some Directions, which may be useful to render our Performance of this Duty, of greater Benefit and Edification to us.

1st. The hearing of Sermons is a Duty incumbent on us, in order to our Instruction; it is so in the natural Reason and Tendency of the Thing it self; for so the Apostle supposes in a Human way of Arguing, when he tells us, that *Faith*, the Faith which has for it's Object; the reveal'd Truths of Religion in general, *cometh by Hearings, and Hearing by the Word of God*, Rom. x. 17. I do not hereby intend, that there is nothing more requir'd effectually to convince Men of the Truths of Religion, than to propound them, after a clear and distinct Manner; we are assured from the Holy Scriptures, that it is one special Office of the Holy Spirit, to open the Eyes of our Understanding, to put the Laws of God in our Minds, and to Write them in our Hearts. And that he is therefore stiled the Spirit of Wisdom, of Revelation and Truth, 1 Cor. ij. 12. John, xiv. 17.

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Yet as the Spirit of God does not destroy the natural Faculties of Men, but only renders them Subservient to his Designs, we ought in concurring with his Motions, to make use of the natural Strength and Liberty of the Mind, as much as we can. Were Men wholly passive in yeilding their Assent to the Truths of Religion, to what End is their Assent requir'd on human and reasonable Motives? The Apostles certainly would never have gone about to establish any Article of Religion, by Reasoning upon it, is as some Men would pretend to prove by *Reason*; we are, in Matters of Religion, wholly to renounce Reason.

Now as the Strength of the Body is augmented by Labour and Application, so is that of the Mind: But, because few Men Labour as they ought in their Search after Truth, and fewer still carry on their Discoveries so far, as to arrive at the Place of her Habitation; they grow Weary and Discourag'd, and being willing to favour their Sloth, are content to take up with Probabilities, upon which they resolve at last whether True or False, to repose themselves. What I Argue, is, That so few Persons having any true Force of Mind, but there being none that have it in Perfection: The Grace of God is become in one Degree or other necessary to all Men: And that in Order both to enlighten their Minds with the clearer Discoveries of Truth, and to give them those inward sensible Delights, which may render the Labour of Attention more Easy and Agreeable to them.

But there is still a further Reason, which renders a Dispensation of Grace necessary towards the Discovery of Truth. When we are willing

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to undergo the Pains requisite to this End, and proceed in our Inquiries, till we have what we seek in a pretty clear and distinct View before us; yet there are many times secret Motives of Vanity, of Interest or Inclination, which hinder us from closing faithfully with it. So that *Seeing, we may See, and not perceive; and Hearing, we may Hear, and not understand.*

It will be readily supposed, That I only speak here of Moral or Religious Truths; for as to Matters of mere Speculation, wherein our Passions or private Regards are not concern'd, when we see any Truth, we see it plainly, and are easily induc'd to yield to the Evidence of it. But had a Man some great Interest to serve, or strong Passion to gratify, in maintaining, that a Part, is as big as the Whole; especially if we could suppose it the common Concern of a Church or Nation, that such a Proposition should be generally assented to; why there is no doubt but it would find as able and numerous Assertors; as that, a Body may be in different Places at the same Instant, which no *Papist* will deny; or, that a Part seperated intirely from the Body, and having no Communion with it, may still continue a Sound and Vital Part of it, which every *Scismatick* does, in effect, and by necessary Construction Maintain.

It were easy to instance, in some Opinions relating to Morality, which great numbers of Men strenuously Assert, and for no other Reason, but because 'tis own Interest, or Inclination that they should be true; or they apprehend some dangerous Consequences (which after all do not alter the Nature of Things) which might follow, and that both with respect

to publick Communities, and private Persons, in case the contrary Principles were admitted :

But every one may consult himself, or his Party, if he have espoused any in particular ; how much the Inclinations of Men generally govern their Belief, and how difficultly they are brought to assent to the clearest Truths, and sometimes to undeniable Facts, when they do not Comport with the Ruling Principles or Passion, that has got the Dominion of their Hearts.

Seeing therefore Men are so many ways inclin'd to disguise, or evade, and where they do not find their Account in it, wholly to Corrupt the Truth ; it is the blessed Office of the Spirit, not only to enlighten the Understanding, but to incline the Will, and to Conquer the Natural Motions of Concupiscence, by those of a Supernatural Impulse : Or in the Words of Holy Scripture, which are much more Forcible and Strong ; to *Purify our Hearts* in Obeying the Truth ; and to *transform us in the renewing of our Minds, that we may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect Will of God.*

Yet, tho' we cannot in the Motives of our submission to Moral or Divine Truths, attribute too much to the Spirit of God, it will not, I conceive, be deny'd, that there are proper and previous Habits of Mind, which tend to facilitate the Operations of Grace, and render them more effectual.

He that, for Instance, has habituated himself to Reason, after a clear and distinct Manner, and always to yield his Assent to Evidence, and to that only, is in a much better Disposition to receive the doctrinal Truths of Christianity, and to discover the Force and Reasonableness of
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them, than a thoughtless or idle Person, who cannot bear to examin things with Care or Attention, and has never had his *Understanding exercis'd, to discern between Good and Evil.* And so again, with respect to the Duties of Christianity; he that with *Cornelius* upon a natural Motive of Religion, gives much Alms, and Prays frequently to God; is in a far better Disposition to assent to the Reasonableness of these Duties of Almsgiving and Prayer, and to practise them as Christian Duties, than a Man who has liv'd all along in a total neglect of God's Worship, and who has seldom or never exercis'd any Acts of Charity, or from a Charitable Motive.

All I would infer from what has been said, is, that since hearing of Sermons is, in the Nature of the Thing, a proper Means of Instruction; we ought to make the best Use of the natural Powers and Faculties of our Minds, to this End, and to improve, as much as possible, all the good and vertuous Dispositions we find in them.

But tho' Nature may be render'd, in many respects, subservient to Grace, hearing of Sermons is principally to be consider'd as a Means of Instruction, under the Notion of a divine Ordinance. And all the Ordinances of God are attended with his special Benediction; there are some of them indeed, which have no direct Tendency of themselves to produce the Effect: God operates by them. The two Sacraments are not instrumental towards the Regeneration of Sinners, by any natural Efficiency, but by Virtue of God's Appointment; there is no visible or natural Connection, between our having the Body wash'd with Water, and our having the

the Heart purified from a State of Corruption and Disorder ; neither has the eating of Bread any direct Power towards making Men more Holy or Perfect, *as pertaining the Conscience*. But God may Sanctify what Means, and to what Ends he pleases : And while we keep to his Institutions, we may piously hope for his Blessing upon them, but never in a way of Opposition to them.

The Efficacy therefore of the Sacraments wholly depending upon the divine Sanction, when they are regularly Administred, by Persons duly Authoriz'd, and according to the Form prescrib'd, we may expect all the good Effects from them, for which they were Instituted ; but when they are Administred in open or direct Contempt of God's Institution, and by Persons Unauthoriz'd and known to be so, they cannot, humanly speaking, be attended with the Blessing which is otherways suppos'd to accompany them. For tho' the Matter and Form are preserv'd in the Administration, yet they want the Authority of an Administrator, which seems equally essential to them, and the Failure of any thing in an essential Part, necessarily destroys the Whole.

The Case is different, with respect to those who take upon themselves the Office of Preaching the Word of God ; and which has something in its own Nature, conducive to the End, proposed by it. But tho' it is a most high Profanation in any Person, who is not call'd of God, to dispense *any* divine Ordinance ; yet to usurp the Ministerial Office, in dispensing the Holy Sacraments, is more culpable, or rather flamingly Impious, in this respect, than the Usurpation of it, in reference to publick Teaching ; that

the unauthoriz'd Teacher employs a Means, which has a natural Propriety to produce some Effect ; but the unauthoriz'd Administrator employs a Means, which in the natural Order of Things can produce no Effect ; the Success of it wholly depending on the Blessing of God ; where-with he has promis'd indeed, to sanctify and favour his own Institutions ; but no where, that we know of, a perverse, or sacrilegious Abuse of them.

I am to shew in the next Place,
2dly, That one great End of our hearing Sermons, is to form and regulate our Practise.

Truth is even abstractedly consider'd a proper Object of the Understanding, and upon the bare Theory whereof it naturally delights to dwell. They, who apply themselves to the more speculative Sciences, and which have no Relation to the Conduct of Human Life, know this to be true. The Metaphisician, or one perhaps that Studies the *Mathematicks*, who has learn'd to Think regularly, and with Attention, often finds a Beauty even in the Discovery of some one Truth, which charms and transports him ; and wherewith he thinks all his Pains most abundantly rewarded. The most violent and sensible Pleasures of a Libertine, are not to be compar'd with those, which Men of noble and refin'd Speculations sometimes taste in silencing their Senses ; in retiring into themselves, and contemplating Truth in her naked and genuine Simplicity : Especially, if they have been so happy as to find her after a long, curious and intricate Search ; or in the Language of *Solomon*,
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after they have *sought for her, as Silver, and searched for her, as for hid Treasure.* And indeed, it is but reasonable in the natural Order of Things, that our noblest Faculties and Pursuits should be attended with the highest and most exalting Pleasures. And we may therefore piously presume, that in a future State, when all the Powers of the Soul shall act with their full Force, one part of our Happiness will consist in *pure Speculation*, and the Discovery we shall make of many sublime intellectual Truths, which have no immediate Influence on the Will and Affections.

But since this World is not a State of Reward or Punishment to Men, but of Tryal and Probation. And the Rule whereby we shall be try'd at the last, does not so much relate to the Improvements we shall make in speculative, as in practical Knowledge, we are to judge of the Condition we are in with, respect to Futurity, not from our having bright and distinct Ideas even of moral or religious Truths, but from our practising the Duties of Religion and Morality, in their full Compass and Extent.

It is indeed our Duty to acquaint our selves with the Principles both of natural and reveal'd Religion; and to get the clearest Notions we possibly can, of them. Without knowing what we are to practise, upon what Motives, and to what Ends; we can practise nothing after the manner or to the Purposes, we ought. Nay, upon this Supposition we should act very unreasonably, tho' our Actions might perhaps happen to be in many Respects good and reasonable in themselves.

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But still if our Knowledge do not tend to animate our Zeal, or our Principles to influence our Practise: If while we have the Light we do not walk *as Children of Light*: The Abuse of these Advantages, will only tend to inflame our Account, and render us Self-condemn'd upon stronger, and more notorious Convictions.

These are Truths which it is much more necessary to remind Christians of, than to prove formally to them. He must be wholly a Stranger to the Nature and Design of Christianity, who does not know, that Obedience to the Laws of the Gospel is an absolute and indispensable Condition of his being fav'd; That, *without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord*; and, in a Word, that *Jesus Christ is the Eternal Salvation*, to those only, *that obey him*.

'Tis true, if we were to judge in this Article from the manner of Life, Christians generally lead, one might be tempted to think, that a holy Life, and the sincere Practise of Religion in all its Parts, is so far from being absolutely necessary to Salvation, that it is not really of any great Importance to this End. For how little Conformity do we in general observe, between the Faith and the Works; between the Confession and the Conduct of Christians?

But the Answer is obvious. Men in this corrupt State, and several Reasons may be given for it, do not always act upon Principle. There are other Springs of Action from their evil Dispositions or Habits, which make them rebel against the Law of their Mind; and frequently carry them against the clearest Light and Conviction of it. The greatest Wonder is, that there are Christians in the World who would destroy
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the Necessity of practising Holiness, even upon Principle; and set themselves to prove, that good Works are of no great Moment in Religion, and that it is even dangerous for Divines to insist so much upon *Morals*.

I shall not at present enter upon a Confutation of those Principles which tend to disparage and cry down Morality; but suppose it your firm Belief, that to obey the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, is of absolute Necessity towards giving you an Interest in the Promises and Privileges of it; and that the great Design, for which it was divulg'd, is to establish Piety and Righteousness in the Earth, and to reveal the Wrath of God more especially against those, who hold the Truth in *Unrighteousness*. And 'tis in this very Respect St. Paul stiles the Gospel, *The Power of God unto Salvation*.

The great Duty therefore of a Minister of Christ in the Discharge of his Pastoral Office, is to shew Men, what they must do to be saved; and effectually to convince them, that according to the Terms of the Gospel, the last and highest Dispensation of Grace, there is no other way of their being sav'd, or *entering into Life*, but by *keeping the Commandments*.

Yet I would by no Means here insinuate any thing, contrary to what the Apostle asserts. That *the Scriptures are profitable for Doctrine*. For 'tis necessary we should know the Principles of Christianity, both as they are reveal'd to this End, and have a powerful Influence, in one Respect or other on our Practice. But it will be granted nevertheless, that those Parts of Scripture, which are profitable for *Correction*, for *Reproof*, for *Instruction in Righteousness*; or towards enforcing the Duties of a strict Morality are

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are of more general Use to be insisted on, and brought home to the Consciences of Men.

There is a Difference between the State of Christians at present, and at the Time when Christianity was first Preach'd in the World. Preaching was then the only Means of Converting Men to the Faith of Christ, and Instructing them in the Articles of his Holy Religion. *For how shall they behave, says the Apostle, in whom they have not heard; or how shall they hear without a Preacher.* But now that the Oracles of God are committed to a standing Writing, and the Key of Knowledge put into our Hands, there does not appear to be so great Necessity on all Occasions, of explaining the Rule of Faith, as of enforcing the Duties of Life. It is not indeed for want of knowing either the Principles or Duties of Christianity, that Sinners ordinarily offend; but for want of Consideration, or their being *stirr'd up, and put in Remembrance*, after a forcible and awakening manner, of what *they know already.*

The most ignorant Hearers will readily enough assent to what we say, upon the Articles relating both to Faith and Morals; but there is more Difficulty in touching their Hearts, and making them truly sensible to any religious Impressions. The greatest Sinners daily repeat the Apostle's Creed, and perhaps believe all the Articles of it. This they can do in a Cursory way, and even with some shew of Piety; but without offering the least Violence to their criminal Inclinations or Habits; or at all considering what Effect their Belief ought to have upon their Lives. And so again, with regard to the Duties of Morality, it is much easier to

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convince a Man of the Reasonableness of all the Commandments, than to prevail with him, to practise any one of them in its full Extent. In a word, 'tis no extraordinary Thing to find Persons, whose Notions of Religion are very refin'd and sublime, and whose Hearts notwithstanding, are in many Respects very corrupt.

It is however, on several Occasions, the indispensable Duty of Preachers to explain the Articles of Faith, and especially in Case of any dangerous and prevailing Errors or *Heresies*. All I contend for is, that Faith without Works, having no Power or Efficacy to save us, and it being Matter of the greatest Difficulty to persuade Men to a Practise conformable to their Belief; Preachers ought more frequently, and with all the Zeal and Favour they can, in Season and out of Season, to press the Duties of a Holy Life; *That the Man of God may be perfect, thoroughly establish'd to every good Work.*

But is it really so much the Duty of Preachers to inculcate the Necessity of Holiness? Then certainly, which is the Thing I would conclude, it must be the Duty of Hearers to obey their Holy Instructions; to bring forth the Fruits of them in their Lives and Conversations; and to finish this Head, if they would not *deceive* themselves in an Affair of the last Consequence, to resolve, that, by the Grace of God, they will be Doers of the Word, and not Hearers only I shall therefore make it my Business.

3dly, To prescribe such Rules as may be proper to render our Hearing the Word of God, more operative and effectual towards a Holy Life. And,

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1st, To the End that those good Instructions, we shall at any time hear, may be put in Practice, we must qualify our selves for hearing them with good and pious Dispositions. When we have no other Design in being present at Sermons or Lectures, but to gratify a vain Curiosity; or that we may appear at least to comply with the Decent exterior Forms of Religion, and by this Means avoid the Imputation of Atheism or Profaneness, which might be of ill Consequence to us in the Pursuit of our Temporal Interests: When we are only acted, I say, by these or any other Human Considerations, there can be no reasonable Hopes, that the *Word Preach'd* should have any lively or lasting Effects upon us.

For tho' God is sometimes pleas'd to prevent Men by his gracious Favour, and to be found of them, who seek him not. Yet he ordinarily confers his Grace according to the Methods of Nature; and carries us on to good and virtuous Improvements from good Inclinations and Desires. Only I would be here, and all along understood, concerning the Operations of Divine Grace, not so much with Respect to the first Conversion of Unbelievers, in which the Methods of it are more extraordinary, but to the Progress they make in the Christian Life afterwards. Tho' when the Apostle tells us, That in the Infancy of the Church, *as many as were ordained to eternal Life*, or (as the Original imports) were found in a good and orderly Disposition for it, *believed*: The Words seem to give us a just Foundation for this Inference, that even in order to their embracing the Christian Faith, it is a great Felicity when Men

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in their Natural Temper are well and religiously disposed. They who are employ'd in the Conversion of Infidels abroad, confirm what is here said, when they observe to us, how difficultly, Persons advanc'd in Years, and who have been under the Power of any corrupt Habits, are brought to confess the Faith of Christ; and that the greatest Number of Converts arise from the younger sort of People, in whom Nature is not yet wholly vitiated, or who have had the Advantages of a more strict and virtuous Education. I shall on this Occasion cite a Passage from Dr. *Whitchcot* in his select Discourses. "We may resolve, *says he*, that the "Difficulty of Faith arises from the Wicked "State of the Subject, rather than the Incredibility of the Object. It is hard to act otherways, "than the State from within doth *dispose* a "Man.

So that with respect both to sanctifying, and illuminating Grace, a good and pious Disposition of Mind is an excellent Preparative to make it operate upon us with greater Force and Facility. *Quicquid recipitur, recipitur ad modum recipientis*, is a Maxim which holds no less true in Moral, than in physical Subjects. Those Truths which we are not dispos'd to entertain or submit to, will either be altogether unwelcome to us, or at the most, entertain'd after a very cold and regardless manner. And therefore our Blessed Saviour, whose Design it was in his Parables, to condescend to the Weakness of his Hearers, and after a familiar Way, to let them into religious and divine Truths, by sensible Representations, tells them, The Seed which sprang up and bare Fruit a hundred Fold, was that, which

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fell on *good Ground*; on such Ground as was either proper of it self, or in some convenient Measure prepar'd to receive it, by the Care and Industry of the Owner. And by this Ground, as he afterwards explains the Parable, is design'd an *honest and good Heart*, Luke viij. 15. By which he intends, that a Heart disposed to yield Obedience to the Instructions, we hear, is the best Qualification to render them really edifying and beneficial to us.

By a good Disposition therefore, I mean something more than a bare transient Desire of having our Duty explain'd to us, or our being affected for the time, with what we hear, after a moving and sensible manner. For transient Desires and Affections, in the Performance of religious Duties, are ordinary in very wicked Men. At the same time God commands the Prophet *Isaiah* to cry aloud, and shew the People of the *Jews* their Transgressions and Sins; he gives them this Testimony. *Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my Ways as a Nation that did Righteousness, and forsook not the Ordinance of their God, they ask of me the Ordinances of Justice, they delight in approaching to God*, Isa. lvij. 1, 2.

And indeed one good Reason in particular, to mention no other, may be given, why the most wicked Christians are often observ'd to have something in them of this *Jewish Spirit*, inasmuch, that they not only hear the Word of God *gladly*, but are for the present so forcibly mov'd and affected with it, that they resolve for the future, to govern themselves by the Rules of it. And the Reason is this, that during the time they hear their Duty represented to them in a clear rational, and lively manner, their
Thoughts

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Thoughts are taken up with considering the Beauties and Excellency of Religion abstractedly, and without regard to the Criminal Pleasures or Interests of this World; Their Consciences and Attention being so awaken'd, that their Inclinations are for some time at least, quite drawn off from these Prospects. And then, I say, 'tis no wonder, that they are struck with the beautiful Representations which are made to them of Religion, and even form to themselves Designs of putting in Practise, what appears on all Accounts, so very just and reasonable. But when their Attention ceases, or they come to execute, what they had so well resolv'd, the Case is very different; for then their sinful Passions, and the Cares of the World, or other Amusements returning upon them, and rendring a sincere conscientious Discharge of their Duty more difficult than it appear'd before, they no longer consider Virtue as lovely and desirable in it self, but as an Enemy to their Interests; laying very heavy, and, according to the different but false Light, wherein they now see Things, most *unreasonable* Restraints upon them. It is not therefore any sudden Heats or Motions in Religion, wherewith the greatest Sinners sometimes find themselves agitated, that I here intend; but a permanent and habitual Disposition to do, whatever the Word of God may require to be done.

2dly, Be careful how you entertain any personal Distaste against the Teacher, under whom the Providence of God has plac'd you. It is too common an Error to think, that for the sake of better Edification, as they call it, Men may, when they see occasion, innocently withdraw them-

themselves from the Ministry of their proper Pastor. And it is not deny'd, that in certain Cases, wherein the Consent of their proper Pastor may be reasonably suppos'd, or they do not give any just Cause of Scandal or Offence, such a withdrawing of themselves may be allowable. But where Men are desirous of *heaping up to themselves Teachers*, out of a vain and wanton Curiosity; in contempt of him who is over them *in the Lord*; or perhaps from some Prejudice they have taken against him; this is both highly blameable in it self, and a direct Breach of that Order, which is so very desirable in all the Churches of God.

We grant, God has not committed all Talents to all Men; and that there are Preachers much superior to others in a rational, clear and persuasive Method of handling the Word of God, and such personal Advantages are highly valuable, and of good Use in themselves. But there is something still in the Character of a Teacher of much higher Consideration; and that is, his Teaching in the Name of God, and by an Authority deriv'd from him. Let us but consider a Person of the meanest Abilities, as invested with this Character; and nothing he can say, provided he say nothing but what he has Authority for, from the Word of God, will be thought Mean or Inconsiderable.

Here then lies our great Error, that, we are more apt to hold Mens Persons, or their personal Qualities, *in Admiration*, than their sacred Powers; and have frequently greater Regard to their natural Abilities, wherewith we find our selves agreeably mov'd and affected, than to the Secret, but less sensible, Motions of Divine Grace;

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Grace; which alone can effectually enlighten the Mind, and convert the Heart; and which God, in the Use of his Ordinances, is often pleased to dispense, without the Embellishments of Eloquence, or other human Arts of Persuasion; *to the End, that our Faith should not stand in the Wisdom of Men, but in the Power of God,* 1 Cor. ij. 1.

And yet there is no Minister of Christ, but who is capable, in one respect or other, of Preaching what is Useful and Instructive; or where he may be less capable, this one Consideration, that he is a *Minister of Christ*, is of more Weight, than all human Considerations whatever.

3dly, Let us charge our Memories with what we hear, and seriously reflect upon it. Tho' we are very attentive to the Preacher, and fully convinc'd both of the Importance of his Office, and of his Instructions; yet amidst the continual Amusements of this World, we are strangely apt, without Recollection, to forget even many Things that made a more than ordinary Impression on us. So that very often the brightest Ideas, which have been rais'd in our Minds of Virtue or Religion, have immediately vanish'd and come to nothing. For we are not more apt to think of what we should not, than to suffer those things to escape our Memories, which ought to be treasur'd up most faithfully in them. As St. James observes in the Words immediately following my Text; where he elegantly compares a forgetful Hearer, to a *Man, beholding his natural Face in a Glass; then going his way; and straitway forgetting what manner of Man he was.*

The Curious have made it a Question, why a Man, who is so frequently seeing his own Face, and sometimes examining, with Care, its several Features, yet does not retain so strong and lively an Idea of it, as of the Face of another Person, whom perhaps he has but once seen, and at a great distance of Time. But one would still think it more difficult, to assign the Moral than the Natural Reasons of a Man's forgetting his own Resemblance; *the Care of the Soul*, and of every thing that relates to it, being infinitely of more Concernment to us, than any thing that has relation to the Body, in any respect.

But we should more especially call to mind and reflect upon such Truths, wherewith, upon hearing the Word of God, our Consciences at any time have been more powerfully awaken'd: Almost every Man, either from natural Temper, or by reason of the Circumstances he is in, has Temptations of one kind or other more peculiarly incident to him; into a compliance with which, he is in greater danger of being drawn or betray'd. But besides the Sin, *which more easily besets us*, the Sin of our Inclination, there are many things wherein, after all our Caution, we all offend: And this renders it Matter of common and daily Obligation to us, *to exhort one another, lest any of us be hardened, thorough the Deceitfulness of Sin*. But because this is a Duty which requires much Prudence and Zeal, and on many occasions proves Ungrateful; God has Instituted a distinct Order of Men, whose special Office it is to Reprove, to Rebuke, and Exhort, in his Name, and after a more Authoritative Manner. When therefore any Admonition from them comes home to the
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Conscience of a Sinner, and tells him, *Thou art the Man*, as in general Admonitions, there will be always something or other proper to remind a Person of his Sins in particular; he should, I say, upon such an Application, not only give the more earnest heed to the Things that are spoken, but carefully lay them up in his Memory, and often reflect upon them, *least at any time he let them slip*; and so heighten his Disobedience to the Commands of God, by the highest Aggravation it is capable of, that of setting at Nought his Counsel, and Contemning his Reproofs, Prov. i. 25.

4thly, We are to consider, that the Word Preach'd is one of those Talents, which God has given us to Profit withal, and whereof we must render a strict Account: For so our Lord himself imports in that Caution to his Disciples, *Take heed therefore how you hear*; and he inforces it with a very powerful Consideration; *for whosoever, contineth he, hath, or makes a good Improvement of the Knowledge, whereunto he hath already attain'd, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, or is found to make no Improve of this Talent, from him shall be taken, even that, which he seemeth to have.*

This Commination of our Saviour is not consider'd, as it ought, by great numbers of Men; they are apt to look upon Preaching, as if it were a Business of principal Concernment to the Preacher; as a Duty to which, the Nature of his Office or Custom has oblig'd him; and wherein he has little or no Pains to take, but to please the Audience, either by his Elocution or Address; the Fluency of his Invention; the Propriety of his Words and Thoughts; the Strength

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of his Memory, or other human Methods of gratifying the ~~Ears~~ of Men, and procuring a favourable Attention.

Whereas in Truth, the principal End of Preaching, or rather, the only End for which it was Instituted, concerns the Hearers. And the Design of it is to instruct the Ignorant, to awaken the Obstinate, to encourage the Good, to comfort the Feeble-minded, and warn the Unruly; or if there be any other Method of extirpating Vice, and promoting Piety, to press it with the greatest Zeal and Fervency upon the Consciences of Men.

Are these Things of an indifferent Nature? Or can we imagine, God has Instituted a distinct Order of Men to teach what it imports us, above all other things to know and Practice, and yet that he has no Design to examin what effect their Teaching has had, or what Account we are able to give of our Proficiency under it? Has God any wise End in his Institutions? If he have; we cannot certainly, after such an Acknowledgment, look upon our publick Assemblies for hearing his Word, as little better than so many popular *Auditories*. But as Assemblies, wherein we receive those Instructions in his Name, which are of the last Importance and Concernment to us; and which we cannot otherwise account for, than by keeping faithfully to them; and shewing our selves obedient in all things, *whatsoever he Commands us*.

5thly and Lastly, That we may receive greater Benefit by this Duty of hearing Sermons, it is our great and more especial Concernment to pray for the Blessing of God upon us in the Discharge of it. By the Grace of God we may
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Profit by the meanest Sermon ; but without it, the ablest Preacher is not sufficient to do any thing towards our Edification ; tho' he should understand all Mysteries, and all Knowledge ; and could speak with the Tongue of Men and Angels. *For neither, as the Apostle argues, is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth ; but God who giveth the Increase, 1 Cor. iij. 7.*

Let us then, on all occasions of hearing his Word, and particularly on the Present, Address our Prayers to Almighty God, that he would put his Laws in our Minds, and write them in our Hearts ; that he would give unto us the Spirit of Wisdom and Sanctification. Of Wisdom, to enlighten our Understandings with the Knowledge of the Truth ; and of Sanctification, to purify our Hearts in obeying it ; so that to conclude all in the Words of an excellent Collect of our Church, *We may both perceive and know what things we ought to do, and also have Grace and Strength faithfully to fulfil the same, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

SERMON VI.

Wherein our Christian Sacrifice, with respect to the Body, principally consists; and the Reasonableness of it.

ROM. xij. 1.

I beseech you therefore, Brethren, by the Mercies of God, that you present your Bodies a living Sacrifice, holy acceptable to God, which is your reasonable Service.

ONE Design of St. Paul, in the foregoing Chapter is, to assert the Doctrine of universal Redemption to all those, whether Jewish or Gentile Converts, who would faithfully comply with the Terms, upon which the Mercy of God is tender'd to them in the Gospel. For that Sinners are not to be absolutely and indifferently Pardon'd, or receiv'd to Grace, but upon

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on certain Conditions appears as from the whole Scope of the Gospel, so particularly from the Apostle's calling the Christian Dispensation (v. 22.) a *Covenant*. For all Covenants in their very Nature and primary Notion, imply a mutual Obligation between the Parties that enter into them.

The Apostle having establish'd this Doctrine of Universal; yet conditional Pardon and Salvation to Sinners, takes Occasion, after his usual manner, to draw a pertinent and practical Exhortation from it.

I beseech or exhort you, therefore Brethren (for so *παρακαλῶ* is indifferently render'd, 1 Tim. ij. 1. — b. 2.) *By the Mercies of God, that you present your Bodies a living Sacrifice, holy acceptable to God, which is your reasonable Service.*

In which Words there are these four Things considerable.

I. The Character of the Person Exhorting. *I beseech you therefore.*

II. The manner of his Exhortation, *I beseech you therefore, Brethren, by the Mercies of God.*

III. The subject Matter of it, *That ye present your Bodies a living Sacrifice, holy acceptable to God.*

IV. The Reason and Ground of it. There is nothing here required, but what is proper to the State and Condition of human Nature; nothing but what is fit and reasonable to be done.

I exhort you therefore, &c.

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I. The first thing considerable is, The Character of the Person Exhorting. Whoever speaks to us in the Name of God, or by a Special Commission from him ; has certainly a Right to our Regard and Attention: So that there may appear to be nothing peculiar in what I here observe, concerning the Character of *St. Paul*, above that of any other Prophet or Teacher, who brings his Credentials from Heaven along with him. Yet when we consider, that the generality of Men are more govern'd by Example, than by Precept, or the intrinsick Reason of Things, we must acknowledge, it adds a very great Force and Energy to the Instructions we hear from any Person, when they come recommended by his own Practice, and that upon two Accounts.

1. Because the Actions of Men discover most evidently to us, the secret Bent and Disposition of their Hearts. Religion is so reasonable in itself, that the most wicked Men, during their sober Intervals, and while the Passions are cool, which at other times possess them, will own the Reasonableness, and even profess themselves willing to submit to the Laws of it. But the true way of Judging, whether a Man be really Hearty and Sincere in what he professes, is from his Conduct, wherein he finds it much more difficult to dissemble the Sentiments that govern him, than by Words, which offer no Violence to his Criminal Inclinations.

2. Because a good Example is a more moving and sensible Argument to the Practice of Piety, than the most beautiful Images, whereby we can otherwise represent it. An Argument better suited,

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suitcd, not only to ordinary Apprehensions, but by reason of the Power, which external Objects have over us *all* in this Life, to the Instruction of the greatest and wisest of Men.

Our Apostle was not only a bright and illustrious Example of the Duty which he here exhorts us to, but there was something peculiar and very extraordinary in his Example, to recommend it. He was, in his *bodily* Labours and Sufferings, for the Gospel *more abundant*, than the rest of the Apostles: His whole Life, after his Conversion, was one continu'd Course of Self-Denial: And in this respect, what our Saviour said of *John* the Baptist, is very applicable to him; he was a *shining* and a *burning* Light: Never any Person could, in a more proper Sense, be said to have *presented his Body a living Sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God*. It would undo a loose and effeminate Libertine, only to read the History of his Travels through *Arabia, Asia, Greece*, and the Western Part of the *Roman Empire*, as far, according to the Testimony of some antient Writers, as this Island of *Great Britain*. To say nothing of the great Difficulties and Dangers he was every where expos'd to, both by Sea and Land; and that which came upon him daily, *The Care of all the Churches*. So that for the space of Thirty five Years, he was continually taken up, in discharging the Duties of his Apostolical Office.

There is something then that carries a particular Force and Authority in these Words, as coming from *him*. *I exhort you therefore, Brethren, that you present your Bodies a living Sacrifice, &c.* I, who for the Service of God, willingly expose my self to every thing, that is grievous
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and afflicting to the Body ; and am so far from gratifying the Appetites of it, in any thing that is sinful and irregular, that in order to restrain and bring them under, I deny my self in *many* things, which consider'd in themselves, are very Lawful and Innocent.

II. The manner of the Apostle's Exhortation.
I exhort you therefore, Brethren, by the Mercies of God.

Common Terms are sometimes the most necessary to be explain'd, there being none of more uncertain and equivocal Signification to the greatest Part of Mankind. Every one, for Instance, at the first Hearing, thinks he perfectly understands what is meant by Conscience, Liberty, Honour and Loyalty. There are few Words, in the Use of which, Men more generally agree, but in the Signification whereof, they are observ'd more to differ. We hear a thousand other Words daily repeated, and almost in all manner of Conversation, which those who repeat them, have no clear or determinate Idea of; or rather, none but what is very confus'd, when they are requir'd to give an Account of them.

Brethren is the ordinary Apellation of Christians which *St. Paul* uses in all his Epistles; and may be thought so very easy and obvious in its Signification, that it is unnecessary to say any thing by way of Explication upon it: There may however be no Impropriety in the Question, whether all Christians do really understand it, according to the full Power and Force of the Word? As denoting the strict Obligation Christians

istians are under to all mutual Offices of Kindness, Humanity and Respect; from their partaking of the same common Rights and Privileges of the Gospel; Their being baptiz'd into one Body *by one Spirit*; and, in a Word, from the Relation they bear to one another by virtue of that Spiritual Union which is between the Church and Christ, the Head of it; A Relation so sacred and endearing, that it obliges us indifferently to consider all Men, whatever Circumstances of Life they are under, as Objects of our Love and Esteem. For as the Apostle argues, *There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, but all are one in Christ Jesus.*

It cannot be said there is no Occasion to remind Christians of the Duties, which this Relation brings them under. It is visible on the other Hand, they do not discover that extensive Charity, and universal Esteem towards one another which might be expected among *Brethren*. The Defects of Brotherly Love are too observable from the Liberties of Slander and Detraction, that are so ordinarily taken in Conversation, from the ill Usage, wherewith Men treat one another, in their Way of Commerce and Dealing in the World; And, not to mention any farther Defects of it, from the incompetent Provision, notwithstanding the publick Laws and private Acts of Charity to this End, which is made for the Poor; and which is not sufficient to prevent their sad and open Complaining in our Streets: Especially in the Streets of our great City, where we have so frequently in *one View* all the Pomp and Luxury of Life, and all the Misery and Disgrace Human Nature seems capable of sinking into. Where we have many occasions

casions of seeing the Parable, if it were no more than a Parable, concerning the Rich Man and *Lazarus* really Exemplify'd, for far as the Representation of it was laid in this Life; but where even the Commonness of the Sight sometimes takes away the Horror, it could not otherways fail to give us. So that, if their outward Condition in this World could afford us any Foundation to suppose, that Man is of a different Species from Man, such a Difference would appear too naturally to arise in our Minds, from such a *Scene*. A Scene, which at the same time represents to us on one Hand, every Advantage which Nature or Art can *here* furnish, and on the other Hand, the want of every thing, that seems requisite, I do not say towards the Comforts or Conveniences, but the necessary Supports of Life.

This Consideration to all tender and ingenuous Minds, or that are in any respect sensible of what is owing to the Dignity of Human Nature, is very Shocking in it self. But it has also, I am afraid, an evil Influence sometimes upon Men to the Prejudice of Religion. For it being a Doctrine commonly taught and receiv'd, that God will provide for good Men, what is proper to supply their necessary Wants, and there being several Texts cited out of the Old Testament, and some few out of the New, to the same End, it will follow, I say, upon this Principle, either that the great Number of wretched People, who are reduc'd to a Condition of Starving, and some of whom actually perish for Want, are abandon'd to all Sense of Religion, and have had no Fear of God before their Eyes, which would be a very uncharitable
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Supposition ; or else, that the Promises in Scripture concerning the Temporal Blessings of Life to good Men, have no certain, or good Foundation ; A Supposition directly tending on the other side to beget in Men *an evil Heart of Unbelief*. There is some Difficulty in reconciling these Things to those who insist too much on the present external Rewards of Religion. But certainly it would be much more for the Honour of Religion, that we should by shewing Mercy to the Poor, prevent any such Objections, than that we should be put upon answering them.

For how indeed can we reconcile such a State of things with the Spirit of Christianity ; or with the Relation, which the poorest Christians that live, bear to Jesus Christ ; and who is not therefore himself ashamed to call them *Brethren*. For *whosoever*, says he, *will do the Will of my Father, the same is my Mother, and Sister, and Brother*. We ought therefore without Regard to the outward Condition of Life any good Christian may be in, and every Christian is to be supposed so, according to the Rules of Charity, where Evidence does not oblige us to make a contrary Judgment, we ought, I say, to consider that Person, as a Fellow-Servant, a dear Friend, a Brother in Jesus Christ ; and to Love, Respect, and, where there is Occasion, to relieve him as such. This is no Stretch in Favour of poor People ; for whom notwithstanding I shall always desire to be an Advocate, but what you see I have the very Words and Spirit of *Christ* to justify me in.

Let us not then slight the Relation of Brethren, as grounded upon a common and transient Form of Speech in the Holy Scriptures. Our
Apostle

Apostle no doubt, had that just and sublime Notion of it, concerning which I have endeavour'd to give you some Account; so that throughout his Epistles he makes it the proper Character and Denomination of Christians. And because we never more effectually persuade Men, than when we address our selves to them in the way of Benevolence and Respect, the Apostle frequently makes use of this tender and engaging Compellation to enforce what he says, and particularly in the Words of my Text. *I beseech you therefore Brethren.*—

2dly, *By the Mercies of God*, that is from the Consideration of those great Things our good and merciful God has done for us, and which in the foregoing Chapter I have been more particularly recounting to you. And certainly upon an ingenuous and good Temper, there is nothing lays so great an Obligation, as the Sense of Favours receiv'd. 'Tis upon this Account, that any Kindness done us, is in the common Language of the World, call'd an Engagement; and that Ingratitude is look'd upon as one of the most odious and infamous Imputations we can fasten upon any Person.

If the Motives of Gratitude to Men, who have in any sensible manner oblig'd us, be so strong and indispensable; how much more ought every one of us to put the Question to himself, with Holy *David*. What shall I render *unto the Lord, for all the Benefits he hath done unto me*; to the Lord, from whom we have receiv'd infinitely greater Mercies and Favours, than Man could do unto us, and from we have infinitely less serv'd them: *To the Lord*; from whom the very Capacity which other Persons have of obliging

us is deriv'd ; and who, besides the many *temporal* Blessings, he gives us *richly to enjoy*, so loved the World, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have *everlasting* Life.

It was upon this powerful and engaging Motive from God's inestimable Love, in the Redemption of the World, by Jesus Christ, his true and *eternal* Son, that the Apostle exhorted the *Romans*, and in them all succeeding Christians, to devote themselves to the Service of God ; And in Return of so great a Mercy, which they were in all Respects so unworthy of, to present their Bodies a living Sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God. Has the Blessed Jesus done and suffer'd so much for us Men, and for our Salvation ; and requir'd nothing of us, by way of Gratitude, for all the Benefits he has done unto us, but a new Obedience ; an Obedience, which if he had not requir'd it, is nothing but our bounden Duty, and *reasonable Service* ? And shall we deny to pay it Him ? Shall we refuse to express our Thankfulness, for his manifold and great Mercies towards us, in such Instances of our Duty as are really at the same time most beneficial to our selves ? How it possible ?

If it be possible that we should act so contrary to all the Principles of Reason and Ingenuity : It concerns us to look to our selves. God is merciful ; he delights in shewing Mercy ; but nothing inflames Justice to a greater Height than Mercy abus'd. *You only*, says God to the *Jews*, *have I known of all the Nations of the Earth ; therefore I will punish you, for all your Iniquities.* Where the special Favours of Heaven towards
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that People are made an Argument of God's visiting their Sins in a more severe and terrible Manner : This is highly agreeable to the common Sentiments of Mankind, who think it reasonable to proportion their Resentments according to the Measure of their despis'd or abus'd Favours.

I hope, we are all of us sensible of the great Mercy of God in calling us to a State of Salvation, thro' Jesus Christ. But let us take Care, that provok'd Mercy, do not end in the severer Vengeance. If the Goodness of God do not lead us to Repentance, our Impenitence, as the Apostle argues. *Rom. ij. 4, 5.* will serve only to treasure up to us the greater Wrath against the Day of Wrath and Revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God. God willeth not the Death of a Sinner, and therefore is mercifully inclin'd to pardon his Sins ; but upon such Terms, as consist with the Rectitude and Holiness of his Nature. To expect God will be merciful to us, while we continue in our Sins, and do Despight to his Grace and Mercy, is not *Faith*, but a most daring and insolent Presumption, which will certainly fail us, when we stand the most need of a well-grounded Faith, at the Hour of Death, and in the Day of Judgment.

And therefore to prevent any such Misapplication or Abuse of the Mercies of God, I shall conclude this Particular with the Caution the Apostle gave to the *Romans* in the preceding Chapter, Ver. xxi. 22. *If God spared not the natural Branches, take heed also, lest he spare not thee, behold therefore the Goodness and Severity of God ; on them which fell Severity ; but on thee Goodness ; if thou continue in his Goodness, otherways*
thou

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thou also shalt be cut off. I exhort you therefore, Brethren, by the *Mercies of God*; which leads me to consider,

3dly, The Subject-matter of the Apostle's Apostle's Exhortation, in the following Words: *That you present your Bodies a living Sacrifice, Holy, acceptable to Good.* To present our Bodies a Sacrifice, imports in general, the devoting all our bodily Powers and Faculties to the Service of God; but the two Terms, *Living* and *Holy*, whereby this Sacrifice is here describ'd, ought to be more particularly consider'd. And,

1st. By presenting our Bodies a *living* Sacrifice is imply'd, that we perform to God a ready and chearful Obedience, that no Difficulties or Discouragements stop us in the Course of our Christian Progress. But that after the Example of our Blessed Saviour, we should make it our *Meat* and *Drink*; look upon it as necessary and agreeable to the Support of the Spiritual Life, as Eating and Drinking are to the Natural, to do the *Will* of God, and continually attend our main Business.

As if the Apostle had said; I exhort you therefore Brethren, that you present your Bodies a Living, that is a *lively* Sacrifice to God, flowing from a free and generous Principle of Obedience, and not forc'd or constrain'd, out of any Motive of private Interest or Vanity, or out of a formal Compliance with Custom, or to avoid the Imputation of Infidelity. Thus our Church, in the excellent Office for the Communion-Service, expresses living by lively: And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, our Souls and Bodies to be a reasonable, holy,

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and lively Sacrifice unto thee ; *Lively* in Opposition to a slothful, negligent, and secure Temper ; or to a mere ceremonious and outward Form of Godliness, without the Power thereof, or any true, and vital Principle of Obedience.

2dly, Living, may be here understood, as 'tis oppos'd to those sensual Lusts and Passions, which have their Source from the Body ; and upon the Account of which the Apostle cries out, *Rom. vij. 24.* in the Person of an unregenerate Man, who shall deliver me from this *Body of Death*. It is certain, and we find it by Experience, that by indulging our sensual Appetites, we are apt to embarrass and oppress the Spirits, to vitiate the best Constitution ; to put the Organs of the Body out of Tune, and by Degrees perhaps to render it a Sink of unwholesome, and even mortal Diseases. All which Disorders must necessarily render the Body a very unfit and dull Companion for the Soul, or rather as it were, a dead Weight hanging upon it, in the more lively Exercises of Reason and Devotion. And therefore we must take care never to indulge our bodily Appetites to any Irregularity or Excess, but rather endeavour to mortify our Members which are upon the Earth, to be dead to Sin ; as those that are alive unto God ; to fight against the old Man, and gain an intire Conquest over him ; that so the Body being perfectly subdu'd to the Spirit, the Weight of Concupiscence may be diminish'd, and the Soul operate with its full Force and Activity ; which 'tis impossible it should do, while we study nothing so much as
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to please and gratify our bodily Appetites. And therefore the Apostle has resolv'd, 1 Tim. v. 6. That *she who liveth in Pleasures*, the Reason holds good to all Persons, that give themselves up to a voluptuous way of living, *is dead while she liveth*; where living in Pleasures, being oppos'd to serving God, in the former Verse, by Supplications and Prayers, denotes to us, how unfit sensual Pleasures render us to present our Bodies a living Sacrifice to God; especially in our devout and more immediate Addresses to him.

A Man must mortify the Body, that it may live unto God: This is exactly agreeable to the Language of the Holy Scriptures, Rom. vi. 6. the Apostle tells us, that the Old Man, by which is principally understood the irregular Motions and Appetites of the Body, is in all regenerate Persons, already crucify'd with Christ. Let us seriously examine our selves by this Rule, whether he be of the Number of the Regenerate, or not.

3dly, *Living*, that is a continual Sacrifice; so *Melancthon* expounds it. Our whole Life in every Part and Period of it, should be consecrated to the Service of God. We must not present our Bodies a Sacrifice to God, to Day, and after the Way, which the World usually takes, go and devote them to the Service of our criminal Passions or Inclinations to Morrow. No, the God we worship will not suffer, what has been solemnly devoted to his Service, to be alienated or prophan'd: Our Incense must burn continually before him; and the Sacrifice of our Body, while we are in the Body, never cease

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to be offer'd. But this leads me to consider,

2dly, The other Affection of this Sacrifice, in order to render it acceptable to God, and that is *Holiness*. A Thing is said to be Holy, that is set apart, and appropriated to the more immediate Service, or Worship of God. This needs no Explanation; so that to present our Bodies Holy, is to keep them in a constant Preparation for the Duties of Religion; to preserve them in a regular, pious, and compos'd Temper; not to suffer our Imagination to be defil'd, or our sensual Appetites gratify'd, to any Disorder or Excess. And in particular to any of those sinful Excesses, which in the Holy Scriptures are term'd the Works of the Flesh; and which are so contrary to the Purity of that Holy and Divine Spirit; who has chosen our Bodies to be a Temple and Habitation for himself. In a Word, to present our Bodies a Holy Sacrifice, is what the Apostle expresses in another Place; by possessing our Vessels in Sanctification and Honour, not in the Lusts of Concupiscence, even as the *Gentiles*, which know not God, *2 Thess. iv. 4.* that is, by abstaining from all those sinful Disorders and Impurities, which separate us at so great a Distance from God, and the Spirit of God; *who hath not call'd us unto Uncleanness, but unto Holiness, Ver. vij.* I exhort you therefore Brethren, that you present your Bodies a *holy* Sacrifice to God. I proceed in the

4th, And last Place, to consider the Reason and Ground of the Apostle's Exhortation; there is nothing here requir'd of us, but what is proper

per to the State and Condition of Human Nature; nothing but what is fit and reasonable to be done. Were the Laws of our Holy Religion against Reason, Men might very justly reason against them: But in all of them, and particularly in this, I have been recommending to you, there is nothing, but what the Light of our own Minds would have discover'd to us, tho' Revelation had been silent concerning them. Accordingly Reason has taught Mankind in all Ages and of all Religions, to glorify God, in their Bodies, as well as Spirits, which are Gods. And tho' a great many Superstitious Rites of Worship have been grafted upon this natural Principle; yet this only shows, that the Light of Nature is much easier corrupted, than extinguish'd.

But here we are attack'd, by a very common, and as the *Free-Thinker* conceives, a very formidable Objection: *Is it reasonable, says he, to imagine, that God has given us Appetites only to deny us the Pleasure of their Gratification? If Nature prompts us, why should Laws deny? Or can that be call'd a reasonable Service, which is in so many Respects contrary to natural Inclination?*

In answer to which, I must satisfy my self at present, by laying down the following Propositions, without making any Remarks upon them.

I. That God being the Creator and absolute Governour of the World, has Power to lay what Restraints upon Men he sees fit, not exceeding the Benefits of their Creation.

II. He has laid no Restraints upon our natural Appetites, but what generally tend to our

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own Good, and the Perfection of our *reasonable* Nature.

III. We think it no Injustice in Secular Potentates, to restrain Subjects in their natural Rights and Liberties, when such Liberties are found inconvenient to themselves, or others, or to the Government in general.

IV. We often upon a Prospect of a future and greater Good, are willing to deny our selfe a present Pleasure or Satisfaction. Nothing is more common, or thought more reasonable: Why then should it be thought unreasonable, that God should put us under some present Restraints, in order to the Advancement of our eternal, and in most Cases, of our temporal Interests? And therefore,

V. The Restraints which are complain'd of in the Christian Religion, are no more than what some of the Wisest *Moralists* and *Teachers* of natural Religion, have laid upon themselves, and prescrib'd to others.

Now if God require nothing of us, but what he has a Right, as the Dread Sovereign of the World to command; *what* is really for our own, and the common Benefit and Happiness of Mankind; *what* in the like Cases, we think it no Imputation upon the Justice of a Secular Prince, a Parent or Master to impose; and *what* we often voluntarily chuse to impose upon our selves; And *lastly*, *what* the Wisest of Men, who had no express Command from God, concerning the Duties of Temperance, and Self-Denial, have practis'd upon a pure Principle of natural Reason and Piety: If God, I say, have requir'd nothing of us, but what is in all these
Respects,

Respects, reasonable to be done; why should we complain of the hard Terms or Unreasonableness of Religion?

These Particulars, are I think, sufficient to answer the Objection propos'd, and to convince us, that the Duty, which the Apostle is here exhorting us to, is in all its Branches, whatever Opposition our carnal and corrupt Nature may raise against it, highly agreeable to the natural Light and Reason of our own Minds.

I shall now conclude with a useful Observation or two upon what has been said. And,

First, We may from hence learn our Defects, and how little the Duties I have been considering are observ'd or practis'd in the World; particularly that of Mortification and Self-Denial. Indeed 'tis to be fear'd, that these are not only unpractis'd, but in a manner unknown Duties, to a great number of Christians; and yet there are no Duties, which the Spirit and Design of Christianity, lead us more to the Consideration and Practice of.

It is visible notwithstanding, that instead of making the Body subservient to the great and nobler Ends of the Soul, the Order both of Nature and Grace is inverted, and the Thoughts of Men generally taken up with the Arts of regaling the Body, and making Provision for the Flesh to fulfil the Lusts thereof.

I do not here only Tax that common and epidemical Vice of Drinking to Excess; that, (which shows how corrupt Men are in their very Principles) is look'd upon as a mere Trifle. But I extend the Observation further to

those Sins which are more expressly said to defile the Temple of God, and therefore above all others, must be suppos'd to render the Sacrifice of Sinners an Abomination to him : And yet, who that considers the Morals of the Age, would believe, that God Almighty has expressly declar'd by the Apostle, 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. That *neither Fornicators, nor Adulterers, nor Effeminate, nor Abusers of themselves* with Mankind, nor Drunkards, shall inherit the Kingdom of God ! Is it not strange, to say nothing of the Reason of the Thing, that after this solemn Declaration of God, Divines should be put, upon proving, that these and the like Disorders are really Sins.

Secondly, What has been said may be useful to correct a very common, but dangerous Error concerning Repentance. Men are apt to flatter themselves in a Course of Sin and Impiety, with the Hopes, in their declining Age, or perhaps in their last Moments of making up the former Breaches of their Duty, by turning to God and lamenting their former Impieties ; that is, when they are past the Pleasures of Sin, or their Bodies are no longer able to follow the Motions of it, They will be content to offer them up a Sacrifice, such as it is to God, in order to reconcile themselves to him, and escape the imminent Danger, that threatens them.

But certainly when the Apostle exhorts us to present our Bodies a living Sacrifice to God, he must design something more than a few Sighs and Groans of a shatter'd decrepid Body, in the Extremities of Life : For this indeed is not to present the Body a living, but
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a dying Sacrifice to God ; and how far such a Sacrifice may be acceptable to him, he has nowhere expressely told us ; and several pious and learned Men are of Opinion, that he will not accept it : But *all* Men of Sense are agreed in this, that 'tis the height of Folly and Madnes, for any Person to put his Salvation upon so very doubtful and dangerous an Issue.

Is it *meet to say to God* ? And yet this is the secret Language of his Heart, when an old beaten Sinner comes to repent ; “ Lord I have
“ devoted the Beauty and Strength of this dy-
“ ing Body, to the Service of my Sins and
“ Lusts ; but finding I have now no Taste or
“ Relish for them, and fearing thy Just and
“ Almighty Vengeance, I desire thee to accept
“ these *dry Bones*, the wretched Remains of my
“ former Follies and Disorders, as the best Sa-
“ crifice I can now offer thee, which yet I should
“ never have thought of offering at all, if my
“ former Strength and Appetites had not fail-
“ ed me : What can be more intolerable ? And
yet this, God knows, is the most of what the Repentance of a great many dying Sinners, amounts to.

May we not justly apply to such Penitents the Words of the Prophet *Malachi*, Ch. i. 8. *Offer it now to thy Governour, will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy Person ?* What Prince upon Earth, would think himself concern'd to accept, or reward the Tender of a Man's Service, in the last Moments of his Life, who had been for the greatest Part of it in actual Rebellion against him, and obstinate to all Overtures of Mercy and Pardon upon his Submission.

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That we may all of us therefore, present our Bodies a living Sacrifice to God, throughout the whole Course of our Lives, while it may be acceptable to him, before the Evil Days come, and the Years draw nigh, wherein we shall say we have no Pleasure in them. The same God of his infinite Mercy grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

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SERMON VII.

The Necessity of knowing *Jesus Christ*, more especially with respect to his Death and Sacrifice.

I COR. ij. 2.

For I determin'd, not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him Crucify'd.

IT seems to have been a popular Objection among the *Corinthians*, against *St. Paul*, that he us'd great Plainness, and Simplicity in his way of Preaching. He does not deny, but ingenuously owns the Charge, in several Passages of the foregoing Chapter: Particularly v. 17. he tells them, he was sent to Preach the Gospel, not with *Wisdom of Words*, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none Effect. That is, lest the Progress of the Christian Religion in the World, should be imputed rather to human Arts of Persua-

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Persuasion, than to the Evidence of its Truth, confirm'd by the Death of *Christ*, and in Consequence thereof, by his Resurrection from the Dead.

Accordingly, in the Verse immediately preceeding my Text, the Apostle tells the *Corinthians*, that he had kept faithfully to his Commission; that *he came not to them, with Excellency of Speech, or of Wisdom, declaring unto them the Testimony of God*; which is the more considerable, because there were few Persons, if any, in the Age he liv'd, better qualify'd to entertain their Auditors with sublime and learned Speculations, or in a finer Strain of human Eloquence.

But these were not the Things about which the Apostle had it in Charge to employ his Thoughts. He was to instruct Men in the Doctrine of a Crucify'd Saviour. This was a Doctrine which requir'd no learned Artifices to enforce the Design of it; and which, if duly consider'd, it was of no Importance to Salvation, what Men knew, or were ignorant of besides. And therefore the Apostle determin'd, in the Words of my Text, not to know any Thing, or preach upon any other Subject, among the *Corinthians*; *save Jesus Christ, and him Crucify'd*.

In which Words there are these two Things considerable:

First, That our Blessed Lord is here describ'd by his Name; *I determin'd not to know any thing among you, save Jesus*.

Secondly, By his Title or Office, more especially that of his Priesthood; *I determin'd not to know*

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know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him Crucify'd.

First, Our Blessed Lord is here describ'd by his Name, *Jesus*. Which Name was given him by the special designation of an Angel, before his Conception ; and afterwards at his Circumcision (according to the usual manner of Circumcising, and Naming Children, at the same time) publickly conferr'd on him by his Parents, *Luke i. 31.*

There were several other Persons of this Name, besides our Blessed Saviour ; but in a strict and eminent Sense, it was peculiar to him. The Deliverances which were wrought by *Joshua*, who is expressly call'd *Jesus*, *Heb. iv. 9.* were only Temporary, and in favour of one particular Nation. But the Benefits of that Salvation, which *Jesus* purchased for us, extend to all Men that fear God and work Righteousness in *every* Nation, and for ever. And upon this account, his great Design was to save us from our worst and greatest Enemies, our Sins, and the dreadful Effects of them, in a State of everlasting and unspeakable Misery ; and also to restore us to a capacity of that Happiness, from which we were fallen. This is the Reason which the Angel himself gives, why the Name *Jesus*, tho' in a lower Sense, common to other Persons ; yet by way of *Eminence*, is appropriated to our Blessed Lord. *Thou shalt call his Name Jesus, for he shall save his People from their Sins, Mat. i. 21.*

It was indeed expressly foretold by *Isaiab*, that the Messiah, the Saviour of the World, should be called by another Name, that of *Emanuel*,
or

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or God with us, C. vij. 14. and this is what the Evangelist observes, *Mat. i. 23.* but it appears from the Reason of St. *Matthew's* citing this Prophecy of *Isaiah*, that the Names *Jesus* and *Emanuel*, both import the same thing. For none could be a Saviour, or capable of freeing us from the Guilt and Punishment of our Sins, but he that was himself without Sin; and therefore inasmuch as all had Sin'd, and fall'n short of the Glory of God, no Man could undertake to expiate for his own Crimes, much less *make an Agreement* to God for his Brother: No: It would have cost more to redeem the Soul of one single Sinner, than all the Sinners in the World were able to discharge. So that had there been no other way of redeeming Mankind, but by their own Performances, the Work of our Redemption must have been *let alone* for ever.

And there are but two other ways, whereby Sinners could be suppos'd capable of being restor'd to the Grace and Favour of God, in the way of Atonement; and that is, either by the Union of an Angelical Nature to the Human, or of a Nature superior to the Angelical, and altogether Divine.

As to an Angel's taking upon him the Person of Man; admitting that he might, in a such a Conjunction, have perform'd a sinless Obedience: Yet his Obedience being no more than Matter of strict Duty, and the Payment of his own proper Debt, could by no means discharge the Debts or Obligations of other Persons, or excuse them from the Penalties to which they were, upon failure of Payment, liable. So that could we suppose, I say, an Angel united, as the Son of God was to a human Person, and by ver-
tue

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tue of that Union, walking in all the Commandments of God, perfectly *Blameless*: Yet his Obedience could no ways tend to satisfy or atone for the *Disobedience* of the rest of Mankind; so that after he had done all that was *commanded him*, his Services would still have been as unprofitable towards the *general* Redemption of Sinners, as if he had done nothing.

The only way therefore of reconciling sinful Man to God, must be by Vertue of the Union of a Nature altogether Divine, to the Human; by an *Emanuel*; by one who may, in a *proper* Sense, be interpreted, *God with us*. No other Person was qualify'd to pass between God and Man, in order to bring them, at such an infinite distance, together; but He that was God, as well as Man: *Man*, that he might in his own Person perform a human and reasonable Service; and *God*, that the Merit of his Service might extend to the Benefit of others; or, if we consider him as making an Atonement for our Sins: *Man*, that he might Suffer; and *God*, that his Sufferings might be Satisfactory and Available.

So that whether our Blessed Lord be called by the Name of *Emanuel*, or *Jesus*; they are only two different Words, to express the same Character. They both import, that there is no other Name, under Heaven, but His, whereby we can be sav'd: Neither is there Salvation from any other, but from Him; who by taking the Manhood into God, was qualify'd to be the only *Mediator* between Man and God. So that *through His Name alone, as all the Prophets witness, whosoever believeth in him, shall receive Remission*

mission of Sins; for God hath highly exalted him, and given him a Name, which is above every Name; that at the Name of Jesus every Knee should Bow, both of Things in Heaven, and Things in Earth, and Things under the Earth; and that every Tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father, Phil. ij. 9, 10.

For ever then, for ever Blessed be this Holy and Adorable Name; which at once includes, in its Idea, all those Blessings which the Son of God, by his meritorious Death and Performances, has entitl'd us to; and withal, the transcendent Glory he has thereby merited for himself, with the Father, above all Principalties and Powers, to all Eternity.

It may not be here improper to take notice of what has been so often, but so very weakly objected, against our Excellent Church; That the Members of it usually Bow, in Token of their Reverence at this Sacred Name *Jesus*.

In answer to which, I shall consider; *First*, The Sense of the Apostle, in the Words I have just now mentioned from *Phil. ij. 9*. And *Secondly*, What the Authority of our Church has determin'd in this Point.

As to the Sense of the Apostle, in these Words, *That at the Name of Jesus every Knee should Bow*: I will own, that bowing the Knee is not here a strict and proper, but a metaphorical Expression; because 'tis enjoin'd Spiritual and Invisibile Beings in Heaven, and under the Earth, as well as Men: And therefore justly speaking, it imports no more, than that all intelligent Beings *should, in a manner, proper to them*, express their Reverence at the mentioning of this great and glorious Name.

But

But Bowing, *as Confessing with the Tongue*, being a proper and significative Expression of Reverence, and as ancient as the Times of *Abraham*, Gen. xviii. 2. before God had made any particular Revelation, concerning the *Exterior* of Religion, or manner of his Worship; and therefore to be look'd upon as a Circumstance of natural Religion: Bowing, I say, being so decent, so natural, and common an Expression of Reverence, is very properly us'd in our religious Addresses to God, especially when we mention that Sacred Name, through which all our Worship is Sanctify'd, and all our Prayers and Services Accepted.

And therefore, tho' I will not say that an Obligation to Bow at the Name of *Jesus*, does necessarily arise from the literal Sense of these Words; yet it follows, by a just Consequence, from the Reason and Design of the Apostle in them: Which is to shew, That *Jesus*, upon the account of that Name which God has given him, above every Name, is to be honour'd by all proper Expressions of Reverence.

Except then it can be shewn, that Bowing is not a proper Action to express our Reverence, according to the Custom of the Place where we live; I might add, of most, if not of all other Nations under Heaven; then the Objection against Bowing at the Name of *Jesus* will appear highly Trifling and Irrational; and an Argument, as in Truth most of the other Objections against the Ceremonies of our Church are, that the Adversaries of it, do not so much find any just occasion, as seek Pretences, to separate from us: It will appear, that I have the more reason for this Reflection; if we consider

in the next Place, what the Authority of our Church has determin'd in this Matter; and especially if we add, upon what Grounds; as to which, I shall only cite to you the Words of the Eighteenth Canon; which enjoins, *That when the Holy Name Jesus is mention'd in Divine Service, due and lowly Reverence shall be done, by all Persons present, as hath been accustomed; Testifying by these outward Ceremonies and Gestures, their inward Humility, Christian Resolution and due Acknowledgment, that the Lord Jesus Christ, the true and eternal Son of God, is the only Saviour of the World.*

And certainly, had there been no Authority to enforce such a Canon, yet the very Reasons, upon which it is founded, would have recommended the Observance of it, to all Pious and Reasonable Persons.

But 2dly, Our Blessed Saviour is here describ'd by his Title or Office, especially that of his Priesthood, *I determin'd to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him Crucify'd.* Christ, in the proper and original Signification of the Word, is the same with Anointed. And there were three considerable Offices among the Jews, to which, when Persons were admitted, the Ceremony of Anointing was us'd. These were the Prophetical, the Regal, and the Sacerdotal Offices. So that to know *Jesus Christ*, is to understand, how *Jesus of Nazareth* was Anointed to be a Prophet, a King, and a Priest; and after what manner he executed the Powers, God had given him in these three several respects; and I might add, to what Ends and Purposes: But I confine my self to consider the two former Parti-

Particulars. First, How our Saviour was Anointed to these three Offices: And Secondly, How he exercis'd them. And there is the more occasion for the former of these Enquiries, because we do not find, that *Christ* was inaugurated to any one of his three Offices, by an external and material *Unction*; but the Reason of this will sufficiently appear, if we consider, that all the Ends, for which the Typical Oyl of Consecration was us'd among the *Jews*, were perfectly and eminently answered, from the designation of our Saviour to his respective Offices, by the *Unction* of the Holy Ghost.

Thus, with respect to his Prophetical Office, *the Spirit of the Lord*, according to the Prediction of *Isaiah*, was upon him, because he had Anointed him to preach the Gospel to the Poor, ch. lxj. 1. Accordingly our Saviour expressly applies this Prophecy, and shews the Accomplishment of it in his own Person, *Luke* iv. 21. So likewise he was consecrated to his Priesthood, not after the Law of a Carnal Commandment, but after the Power of an endless Life, *Heb.* vij. 16.

He was Anointed to his regal Office, by the same special designation of God: And therefore the Psalmist describing the Beauty and Glory of his Kingdom, and his righteous Administration of it, Addresses him in the following Words; *wherefore God, even thy God, hath Anointed thee with the Oyl of Gladness, above thy Fellows*, Psalm xlv. 8.

Christ having then an inward and spiritual *Unction* to his respective Offices, as the chief Reasons of using any material Oyl, ceas'd in respect to him, the Use of it also evidently ceas'd with them. I shall therefore proceed to shew,

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2. How, or in what manner Christ exercis'd the Offices he was Anointed to. As to his Prophetical Office; it consisted, in making known the Will of God to Mankind; in correcting the Errors in Doctrine and Worship, which were crept into the Jewish Church; and in setting the Truths of the moral and immutable Law before Men, in a clear and convincing Light. This was the Design of our Blessed Saviour in his excellent Sermon upon the Mount, wherewith he open'd his Ministry, and wherein he gives us the Sum and Substance of natural Religion, taking occasion to shew the Defects of human and unassisted Reason, with respect to several Branches of Morality; and how much the Jews, by their false Glosses and Traditions, had corrupted even some of the most important Principles of it, and thereby rendred them of *none effect*.

The Laws relating to the external Polity of the Jewish Church and Nation, being only Temporary, and of course to cease, when the Desire of *all Nations* should come: Our Saviour gave no particular Rules or Directions to enforce the Observance of them, but made it his Business to instruct Men in the weighty and substantial Duties of Religion, arising from the eternal Reason and Order of Things, in pursuance of that Covenant, which God had declar'd he would enter into with his People, in the last Days; but not according to the Covenant he had made with their Fathers, *Jer. xxxi. 32.* for the Tenor of this new Covenant, as it follows in the next Verse was, That God would put his Law in their inward Parts, and write it in their Hearts; that is, instead of those numerous Rites

Rites, and positive Commands, which God formerly imposed upon the People of the Jews, and which had no intrinsic Goodness in them, he would now give them a Body of Laws suitable to their natural Notions of Things, and the inward Dictates of their own Hearts and Consciences.

Our Saviour, throughout the whole Course of his Ministry, kept to the Terms of this Covenant, and reduc'd the Law and the Prophets to these two general and natural Heads, The *Love* of God, and of our Neighbour; or to such particular Instances of our Duty, as flow by a necessary Consequence from these two main Springs. So that I may suppose you have already prevented me, in the Use I am going to make of what has been said; which is to shew, That no external Performances, or profession of Religion, will recommend our Obedience to God, if we do not practise the natural and essential Duties of it; if we do not do *Justice* and love *Mercy*, and walk *humbly* with our God. This is our Christian, our *Reasonable* Service.

But the Office of a Prophet was not only to instruct Men in their Duty; but, as the Word primarily imports, to foretel Things to come; our Saviour discharg'd this part too of the Prophetical Office, as occasions offer'd. He foretold, That he should be Betray'd by *Judas*, Deny'd by *Peter*; with the Circumstances of this Apostle's Denial, and the manner of his Death. But to mention no other of his Predictions, what he said concerning the Jews, is very Solemn and Particular; but what was, in every respect, remarkably accomplish'd; and the accomplishment

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of it, upon the Nation, and Temple of that People, in the final Destruction of both, ought to confirm our Belief, that he will also, as he foretold, assuredly come again the Second Time, with Power, *unto Salvation*: To the Salvation of his true and faithful Disciples, who by patient Continuance in Well-doing, seek for Honour, and Glory, and Immortality; but to the Destruction, the eternal Destruction of those, who obey not the Truth, but *Crucify* him afresh, by their Sins and Lusts.

2dly, Our Saviour's regal Authority consisted in his Triumph over his Enemies, by his Resurrection from the Dead, and in his Exercise of those full Powers, which were thereupon given him, *Mat. xxviii. 18.* Power is the proper Attribute of a King: But for a Person, whose Body had lain three Days in the Grave, to loose the Powers of Death, and put all the Springs of Life in Motion again, after they had been so long dis-united and broken; this was an Argument of a Power really *Divine*, and superior to all Natural Causes.

Accordingly the Resurrection of Christ, is in several places of Scripture made a Proof of his Royal Dignity and Office; and particularly, *Acts xiii. 33.* It is the Ground of applying to him those Words of the Second Psalm; wherein the Kingdom of Christ is so eloquently Described: *Thou art my Son, this Day have I begotten thee.* It is also urg'd by the Apostle, *Acts xvij. 31.* As a Proof of our Lord's Second Coming, in the Glory of his Father, and with all the visible Ensigns of Power and Authority, to Judge all Mankind.

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In consequence of the Powers, committed to our Saviour at his Resurrection, he appointed a certain, and successive Order of Men, for the better Discipline and Government of his Church; and promis'd to be with them, in the Execution of their Office, to the End of the World. One main part of the Office, which he empower'd them to Exercise, consisted in *Binding*, and *Loosing*; that is, in retaining Persons in the Communion of the Church, and the Enjoyment of all its just Rights, and in excluding obstinate and notorious Offenders out of it, and in Consequence from the Benefit of those Rights.

And indeed, if Christ had not left such a Power to his Church, he had been so far from providing for the good Order and Government of it, that he had *left it* in a worse Condition, than any other regular Society upon Earth. For certainly, no regularity or decorum can be observ'd in *any* Society of Men; where there is not a Power lodg'd in some of its Members, to exclude those from the Priviledges, who do not conform to the Rules of it; and especially if they endeavour to subvert the Constitution upon which it is founded. Now if we allow such a Power to the several Societies and Communities of Men in Civil Life; for what reason should we deny it to those, who have Authority in the Church of God, under Christ, the Head of it? For no reason, I conceive, but that, which, instead of proving God Almighty a God of Order and Peace, will render him, what some Persons have taken great Pains to do, the Author of *Confusion*, in all the Churches of the Saints.

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As Christ is a *King*, he has Power to prescribe Laws for the good Government of his Church; and as he is a *wise* King, no doubt he has prescribed such Laws, as may most effectually tend to preserve Peace, and Order, and Discipline in it. But now, according to the Principles of ~~some~~ People, That a Man may be of any Religion, or of no Religion; That he may worship God in what Place, or in what Way he likes best, without any regard to Ecclesiastical Censures or Jurisdiction: Upon this Supposition, I say, there could be neither Peace, Order, nor Discipline, in the Church of Christ; but only a wild incoherent Rabble of Men, professing Christianity perhaps, but doing what might seem Good in their own Eyes, and saying, in effect, they will not have Christ Reign over them.

But I hope, M. B. ye have not so learn'd Christ: If you own him for your King, be careful to obey his Laws; not only those Laws which relate more immediately to your own particular Conduct; but those which require your Obedience and Respect to the Ministers of his Spiritual Kingdom; those Laws which tend to preserve Order and Government in his Church, and to make it as a City that is at Unity with itself.

3ly, Our Saviour's Sacerdotal Office, upon which the Apostle here more particularly directs our Thoughts, consisted in his making an Attonement upon the Cross for our Sins, and there shedding his most precious Blood. I am sensible, the other part of our Saviour's Sacerdotal Office, as those of his Blessing and Interceding for us, afford very proper and excellent
Matter

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Matter for our Mediations: The Apostle therefore, when he determines to know nothing, but *Jesus Christ, and him Crucify'd*, does not exclude his other Performances, as a Priest, in our Behalf; he only mentions his Crucifixion, or his Offering up himself a Sacrifice and Oblation for the Sins of Mankind; as this was the most solemn and important Act of his Priesthood, and that, to which the Scriptures, in a more peculiar manner, ascribe our Redemption.

It is further probable, that the Apostle might be more especially determin'd to exercise his own, and the Meditations of those he Preach'd or Writ to, upon this Article of the Death of Christ; as it gave so general an Offence, both to the Jews and Gentiles. The more the Doctrine of a Crucify'd Saviour was oppugn'd and decry'd, the greater Reason the Apostle had to shew the Necessity of believing it, and to discover to himself and others, the Wisdom of God in it. Let us hear himself accounting for his insisting so much upon this fundamental Principle of our Christian Faith, *c. i. v. 23, 24. But we Preach Christ Crucify'd, unto the Jews a stumbling Block, and unto the Greeks Foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God.* The Death of Christ being a most wise and most excellent Method, at once to expiate for Sin, and to reform the Sinner.

It is pretended indeed, by the *Socinians*, that the Death of Christ was not properly an expiatory Sacrifice; and that it was only acceptable to God, as an Expression of our Saviour's intire Obedience and Submission to his Will. So that when we are said to be redeem'd by the Blood
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of Christ, they pretend, that these Words are not to be understood *causally*, but only *consequentially*; that is, Christ, in consequence of his Death, which was so highly pleasing to God, was exalted at his Right Hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour; and had that Power in Heaven and Earth committed to him, whereby he is able to save those, who come unto God by him.

But nothing can be more contrary than this Supposition, to many express Texts of Scripture; which Attribute our Redemption to the Sacrifice of Christ upon the Cross, as to an immediate and *meritorious Cause*. Surely, saith the Evangelical Prophet, *he hath born our Grievs, and carry'd our Sorrows—he was bruised for our Iniquities, the Chastisement of our Peace was upon him, and by his Stripes we are healed*, Isa. liij. 45. Accordingly Christ himself tells us, *Mark x. 45. that the Son of Man came to give his Life a Ransom for many*. And *Rom. iij. 44. God hath set forth Jesus Christ to be the Propitiation for our Sins, thro' Faith in his Blood*. All these are Sacrificatory Expressions, and denote as plainly as 'tis possible for Words to do; that the Death of Christ was a true, proper, and propitiatory Sacrifice.

How far his Death was *necessary* to the Pardon of Sin? Or whether God could not, with the Safety of his Justice, and by Right of his absolute Authority, have pardon'd Sinners, without any Sacrifice or Attonement at all? Are Questions, which it does not at present concern me to speak to; I am only to observe to you, that whatever God had a Right to do, yet in Fact, he has chosen this way of reconciling the World
unto

unto himself, by the Death of Christ: And that Christ by thus dying for us, perform'd the true and peculiar Office of a Priest. From the Consideration whereof I might make many useful Inferences; but the Apostle has made one, upon the same Argument, *Heb. ix. 13, 14.* which I cannot omit to remind you of; *If the Blood of Bulls, and of Goats, and the Ashes of an Heifer sprinkling the Unclean, satisfy'd to the purifying of the Flesh; how much more shall the Blood of Christ, who through the Eternal Spirit, offer'd himself without Spot to God, purge your Consciences from dead Works, to serve the living God?*

According to the Method propos'd, I have given you as particular an Account, as the Time would permit, both of the Name *Jesus*, and of the Nature of *Christ's* Mediatorial Office; as a Prophet, a King, and a Priest; with such occasional Remarks, as appear'd to me, most proper and seasonable. Give me now leave, by way of Conclusion, to offer to your Consideration these Two Things.

First, The Advantage of a standing Record, or History of what Jesus Christ did, and suffer'd for us Men, and for our Salvation, and of the Doctrines which he taught.

Secondly, The Obligation we are under, to instruct our selves in the Knowledge of Jesus Christ, with respect to all the Parts of his mediatorial Office.

1st, Let us consider the Advantage of a standing Record or History, of what Jesus Christ did and suffer'd for us Men and for our Salvation, and of the Doctrines which he taught.

If

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If it be necessary for us to know *Jesus Christ*, certainly, there could have been no way found out, so proper to convey the Knowledge of him, to all succeeding Ages, as by committing a Report of his Discourses and Actions, to an authentick Writing. To convince us of this, we need only consider, what actually happen'd to the People of the *Jews*, before *Moses* publish'd the History of the Creation, and of God's dealing with that People; For when He was commanded to go to the Children of *Israel*, and acquaint them with God's gracious Design to deliver them out of the Hand of *Pharaoh*, *Gen. iij. 8.* he is discourag'd at the Message, and looks upon it as impracticable: *Behold*, says he, *when I come unto the Children of Israel, and shall say unto them, the God of your Fathers hath sent me unto you, and they shall say unto me, what is his Name? What shall I say unto them?* Whereby it appears, they were so far sunk in Slavery and Ignorance, that they had forgot the very Name, whereby God made himself known to the Patriarchs, and the noble Works he had done in their Days; which could not possibly have happen'd, if any standing Memorials of the Facts recorded in *Genesis*, had been preserv'd among them.

To prevent any such gross Ignorance or Corruption concerning God and Religion for the future, *Moses* compil'd the Five Books, that under his Name, and writ the Law in Two Tables of Stone, by the special Command of God. It was upon the same Grounds the *Evangelists* left us authentick *Memoirs*, of all that *Jesus* began to do, and Teach, until the Day, in which he was take up. The rest of the Ho-
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ly Scriptures were caus'd by God to be written for our Learning and Instruction; that we should not be left to gather the sacred Truths, contain'd in them, from the loose and scatter'd Accounts of Oral Tradition, which is so apt to be corrupted, by the Ignorance or Design, the Vanity or Negligence of Men; and at the best, is very Precarious and Uncertain; but that we should have one perfect and intire Collection of all those Truths and Facts, which are of most Importance to us to be known concerning Jesus Christ, and him *Crucify'd*; and therefore 'tis observable, that of all the Parts of our Saviour's Mediatorial Office, none is so fully and particularly describ'd in the New Testament, as his Sacrifice upon the Cross, and the Methods of our Redemption by it.

2dly, Let us consider the Obligation we are under, to instruct our selves in the Knowledge of Jesus Christ, with respect to *all* the Parts of his Mediatorial Office: When the Apostle determines to know nothing, or to Preach nothing among the *Corinthians*, but what relates to Jesus Christ, he does not absolutely condemn all other sorts of Knowledge; what he intends to show, is, that it is the Duty of Pastors to instruct the People in all the Necessary and fundamental Points of Christianity; and that how knowing soever Men may be in other Respects, yet the Knowledge of Jesus Christ alone is able to make them wise unto Salvation. The Author of our Holy Religion understood all Mysteries, and all Knowledge: He *could* have laid down the most exact Plan of Civil Government, and given us a *System* of the most refin'd Politicks; he could have prescrib'd us the true Rules of
Oratory,

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Oratory, and of that noble Simplicity, wherein he deliver'd his Discourses and Parables; he could have corrected all the past Errors in History and Chronology, and solv'd all the Problems in Mathematicks and Natural Philosophy. He might, if he had thought fit, have given us a perfect Diagram of the Motions of the Heavens and the Earth; and told us, whether there were any more habitable Worlds, than this, and what sort of Inhabitants dwell in them; Yet he did not make it his Business to instruct Men in any Truths, but what related to the Knowledge of God, and the Means of Salvation, by *himself*.

Let us therefore, whatever we are ignorant of besides, be careful to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent. The Knowledge of other Things may be an Ornament, or an agreeable Amusement to us; but this, and this alone, can make us happy, and bring us to Life Eternal: In the Judgment of *St. Paul*, this is the one Thing necessary for us to know, in order to Salvation. And seeing, the Knowledge of it, is only to be learn'd from the Holy Scriptures; let us have then frequently in our Hands, and read them, with that pious Temper and Disposition of Heart which may render the good Seed of the Word, in them fruitful; that it may grow up to everlasting Life.

When we take any Book in Hand, the principal Things that recommend it to us, are either the Importance of the Matters it may contain, or the Manner wherein it treats of them. The Writings of the New Testament, come recommended to us, above all other Books
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in the World upon both these Accounts; they contain Matters of the highest and last Consequence; they acquaint us with the nature of our Duty, as deliver'd by Jesus Christ, in his Capacity of a *Prophet*; they show us, what, as a *Priest*, he has done, and suffer'd for our Salvation; and as a *King*, upon what Terms, he actually will save us, when he comes in Glory with his Holy Angels, and all the Host of Heaven attending him, to judge the World.

That we may all of us, under these Advantages of Instruction, endeavour to know God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent, from the least to the greatest, according to the Tenor of that ancient Prophecy, *Jer. xxxi. 34.* concerning the Times of the Gospel-Dispensation. God of his infinite Mercy grant, thro' the Merits of the same Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord and Saviour. *Amen.*

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SERMON VIII.

The Doctrine of a future Judgment confirm'd by the Resurrection of Christ; with the proper Uses arising from it.

ACTS xvij. 31.

Because he hath appointed a Day, in the which he will judge the World in Righteousness, by that Man, whom he hath ordain'd; whereof he hath given Assurance unto all Men, in that he hath raised him from the Dead.

MEN have been at all times sensible, that in order to the Pardon of their Sins, it was necessary they should repent of them. But the several Ways, they have chosen to express their Repentance, have not been so generally agreed upon. Some have placed the *Merit* of it, in coming before their Gods, with costly Offerings

ings and Oblations; with the Blood of numerous Bulls and Goats; *others* in giving their First-born for their Transgression, the Fruit of their Bodies, for the Sin of their Souls; others again in celebrating certain *Mysteries*, or, as they term'd them *Sacred*, but in truth most impious Rites of Worship; and which very often stood in greater need of Repentance, than the very Crimes which they pretended by this Method to repent of.

There were here and there, 'tis granted, some few Persons, who addicted themselves to Philosophy and the Sciences, that had more refin'd Notions concerning the Duty of Penitents; that talk'd of an inward *reasonable Service*, and the Necessity of serving God with clean Hands, and a pure Heart. But as the Doctrine of these *Moralists* was neither plain nor general enough to influence the People, nor always conformable to their own Practice, God, who makes gracious Allowances for the Defects of Men, arising either from the want of Capacity, or the unhappy Circumstances of their Education, declares by the Apostle in the foregoing Verse, That *the Times of this Ignorance he winked at*. But now, now that he hath made a clear and perfect Revelation of his Will to the World; he will no longer bear with such horrid Impieties and Profanation, but *commandeth all Men every where to Repent*. And the Reason of this Command does not only follow in the Words of my Text, but they also imply the Nature of that Repentance which is here enjoyn'd,

Because God hath appointed a Day, in which he will judge the World, *in Righteousness*, by that Man whom he hath ordain'd, whereof he

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hath given Assurance unto all Men, in that he hath raised him from the Dead.

In which Words these Four Things offer themselves to our Consideration.

I. An exprefs Declaration of God concerning a future and general Judgment. *He has appointed a Day, wherein he will judge the World.*

II. The Justice and Equity of his Proceedings at that Day. He has appointed a Day wherein he will judge the World, *in Righteousness.*

III. The Designation of the Person, who is to be our Judge. *That Man, whom he hath ordained.*

IV. And *Lastly*, A very particular and extraordinary Circumstance to convince us of the Truth and Certainty of his coming to judge the World; and that is, by his *Resurrection* from the Dead.

I. The first thing considerable is, an exprefs Declaration of God concerning a future and general Judgment. He hath appointed a Day, wherein he will judge the World: It must be own'd, that the natural Proofs of a Judgment to come, had it not been made an Article of our Faith, are very strong and cogent. The promiscuous Distribution of the Blessings and Evils of this Life to wicked and good Men: The Triumphs of Injustice, and notorious Oppression of Right, and that not for a short time, but for a Course of many Years, and sometimes Ages, have been all along made an Argument, that the Judge of all the Earth will *one Day* do Right, and justify the wise, tho' unsearchable Methods of his Providence in this World,

World, by rewarding the Innocent, and bringing the successful and presumptuous Sinner to condigna Punishment.

And indeed there is nothing more true or certain in Fact, than what *Salomon* observes, *Eccles. viij. 14.* *There are just Men, to whom it happeneth according to the Work of the Wicked: Again, There are wicked Men, to whom it happeneth according to the Work of the Righteous.* And it still renders this Observation of greater Force to prove a future Judgment, that *Salomon* not only founds it on the different Success or Fortunes of private Men, but of Persons who are seated at the Helm of publick Affairs; for so he complains, *c. iij. 16.* *And moreover I saw under the Sun, the Place of Judgment, that Wickedness was there; and the Place of Righteousness, that Iniquity was there.* And from hence he concludes in the following Verse, That there is a Day coming, wherein, how unequally soever the Providence of God may seem to dispense the Rewards or Punishments of this Life, Yet his Justice will most remarkably Discover and Vindicate itself, by proportioning his Retributions, after a more distinct and conspicuous manner, to the Virtues and Sins of Men. *I said in my Heart, God shall Judge the Righteous and the Wicked, for there is a Time there, or with him, for every Purpose, and for every Work,*

Now, tho' in general it might be granted, no evident Proof of a future Account to be given of their Actions, that God Almighty now and then suffers very wicked Men, who may have some generous and useful Qualifications to prosper; and on the other Hand, sometimes permits very good Men, for certain private Sins

or Follies they have been guilty of; or for other Reasons, to be expos'd to the greatest Hardships and Calamities of Life; yet it seems to bear somewhat more hard upon the Goodness and Justice of God, that his Providence should dispose the Order of Things after such a manner, as either to render the very Virtues of Men Instrumental to their Ruin or Disgrace, or their Wickedness the visible Means of their Prosperity and Power.

If the supream Governor of the World take any notice of what is done in it, surely he cannot see such open *Ungodliness and Wrong*, with any other Design; but to requite with his Hand. So that if we believe there is a God, who Judgeth in the Earth, it seems a necessary Consequence to those, who have any Honour for the glorious Attributes and Perfections, of his Nature, That he will one Day proceed with wicked and good Men upon other Measures, than according to the ordinary Events of his Providence here; or in the Words of my Text, That *he has appointed a Day, wherein he will Judge the World in Righteousness.*

But tho' this and several other Proofs, which are drawn from natural Religion, of a Judgment to come, should be allow'd not only highly probable, but very evident; it must be own'd notwithstanding, a great Happiness to Mankind in general, that God has been pleas'd to make this natural Principle an Article of our Christian Faith. For, by this means, those who are not able to Reason justly on the Nature of Things, or to carry on a long Train of Proofs, are convinc'd of the Truth of a future Judgment, upon the Authority of God, without being

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ing oblig'd to give any other Reason for it; while they, who are able to support this Truth with proper Arguments, are freed from the many Doubts and Difficulties which are apt to occur to them, when they barely Reason upon the Strength of their own Faculties, and after the manner of Men.

A Divine Authority lays a firm and solid Foundation for the Mind to rest upon; and this one Revelation, that God has appointed a Day, wherein he will Judge the World, is more forcible and convincing, than all human Proofs and Arguments in the World, concerning a future Judgment.

And therefore, to shew the Expediency of the Christian Revelation on this Article, the Apostle asserts, *That Christ brought Life and Immortality to Light, thro' the Gospel.* That is, He has establish'd this great fundamental Article of Religion upon a clear and firm Foundation; so that how much soever it was obscur'd to those, who reason'd only from natural Principles, it is now supported by a Divine and Infallible Authority.

2. I am in the next Place to consider, the Justice and Equity wherewith God will proceed in Judging the World, *He hath appointed a Day, wherein he will Judge the World in Righteousness.* The Justice of the Proceedings at that Day, will appear in this, That God, in Rewarding and Punishing Men, will make a more visible Distinction between the Wicked and the Good, than he ordinarily does in this Life, *He will then render to every Man according to his Works. To them, who by patient continuance in Well-doing, seek for Honour, and Glory, and Immortality, eternal*

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Life. But to them that are Contentious, and obey not the Truth, but obey Unrighteousness; Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish, upon every Soul of Man that doth Evil, Rom. ij. 6, 7, 8.

Herein also lies the Justice of the great and last Court of Judicature, that no partial Regard shall be had to any Persons, on account of their superior Quality, Fortune, or other Advantages in this World: So that how necessary soever the civil Distinctions of Life may be, towards preserving the good Order and Government of Mankind, all Men shall then be indifferently judg'd, *without Distinction*: For as the Apostle argues, at the eleventh Verse, *There is no Respect of Persons with God*. He will Judge every Man, be who he will, not according to any Arbitrary Rules of Favour, at that Day, but according to what he hath done *in the Body*, whether it be good or bad.

To shew the impartial Execution of Justice at that Day, we have a particular Enumeration of the Men of the Earth, who have abus'd their Power, their Authority or Wealth to sinful Ends, and a very lively Image of the Horror and Despair which will then seize them, *Rev. vj. 15, 16, 17. The Kings of the Earth, and the great Men, and the rich Men, and the chief Captains, and the mighty Men, and every Bondman, and every Freeman hid themselves in the Dens, and in the Rocks of the Mountains, and said to the Mountains and Rocks, fall on us, and hide us from the Face of him that sitteth on the Throne, and from the Wrath of the Lamb, for the great Day of his Wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand.*

What

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What a wretched Account will all the sinful Gains and Acquisitions of this World then turn to? And how dismal a Scene will all the Pomp and Pleasures of a vicious Life terminate in? Will any of these Things Profit in the Day of Wrath? Will they be able to deliver one Soul, among the many Millions they have betray'd into everlasting and unspeakable Misery? No: These gay and splendid Trifles are for ever gone themselves, and their Place is no where to be found: All that remains of them to the Sinner is, the Stinging, the ever Stinging Reflection of his having once possess'd, and mis-employ'd them.

Yet the strict Demands of Justice at the last Day, will be temper'd with *Equity*. For if God should proceed with us in Rigour, and be Extreme to mark what has been done amiss; who would be able, so much as to bear the Thoughts of standing before him; we may therefore hope, from the Goodness and Benignity of his Nature, that he will consider whereof we are made, and grant all merciful Allowances that are possibly consistent with the Honour of his Laws, to human Frailty, and the Imperfection of our Obedience. But the Consideration of the last Judgment, with respect to the Equity of it, in this Sense, will fall very properly under my next, and

3^d Particular, concerning the designation of the Person, who is to be our Judge, *That Man whom he hath Ordain'd*. It might perhaps have been thought more suitable to the awful Solemnity of the last Day, and the Dignity and Glory wherein Christ will then appear; if he had been describ'd in the Character of our Judge,

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as the *Son of God*, the Brightness of his Glory, and the Express Image of his Person; or in those other magnificent Terms, wherein he is so often spoken of in the prophetic Writings. But still it is more suitable to the State and Condition of Mankind, and his tender Compassion towards them, that when he speaks of coming to Judge the World, he should rather give us an Idea of his Human, than his Divine Nature.

For indeed, when we consider the infinite Perfections of the Divine Nature, and at what an infinite Distance our Sins have separated us from it, had the Eternal God himself, without the interposal of a Mediator, thought fit to convene the World in Judgment before him: Alas! The best of Men would have been so oppress'd with the Thoughts of his Glory, and their own Demerits, that they must of Necessity, even under their best grounded Hopes, have sunk into great Despondency of Mind: But on the other Hand, when we consider that our Judge has taken upon him our human Nature; that he will appear in it; and knows the Infirmities of it: This is Matter of unspeakable Consolation to Sinners, under the Apprehension of all the Sins they stand Charg'd with; and cannot fail of giving them greater Boldness of Access to their Judge, by preventing every anxious Thought which might arise from a Sense of their own Frailties, or from any suppos'd Rigour in his Proceedings. He that has assum'd our Nature, and done and suffer'd so much for us in it, will certainly shew all the Lenity and Tenderneſs to it, which the Terms of Evangelical Obedience will admit. For what the Apo-
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He speaks of *Jesus Christ*, as our High Priest, may with equal Propriety be apply'd to him, as executing this Office of his Judiciary and Regal Power. *We have not a Judge, who cannot be touch'd with the feeling of our Infirmities; but was in all Points tempted like as we are, yet without Sin: Let us therefore come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain Mercy, and find Grace and Help in Time of Need.*

How is it possible for the best Man living, without Fear and Trembling to consider, That he must one Day stand in Judgment before a just Omniscient, and All-powerful God; in order to be Sentenc'd to an Eternity of Happiness or Misery, according to the Good or Evil he has done in this Life. But if any thing can allay the Terror of such a Consideration, it must be this, That our Judge is the Saviour of the World; the one Mediator between God and Man; *The Man Christ Jesus.*

And therefore it is observable, that our Lord himself assigns his taking our human Nature, and the Infirmities of it, upon him, as the very Reason why God hath constituted him the Judge of the World. *The Father*, says he, *hath given him Authority to execute Judgment also, because he is the Son of Man, John v. 27.* and accordingly in the Twenty-fifth Chapter of *St. Matthew's Gospel*, where he more particularly describes the solemn and awful Process of the last Judgment, tho' he speaks of it in very high and lofty Terms, and represents himself surrounded with Myriads of Angels sitting upon the Throne of his Glory; yet to moderate that Dread and Astonishment which would arise in the Minds of his most faithful and true Disciples,
from

from a Sense of his Divine Prefence and Majesty, he is pleas'd, even in the midst of his Triumphs, and all the glorious Appearances wherein his Divinity will then shine forth, to Stile himself the Son of Man, (*v. 31.*) it is for the same Reason that the Apostle, in the Words of my Text, speaking by direction of the Spirit of God, concerning the last Judgment, tells us it will be executed by *the Man*, whom God hath Ordain'd.

4thly and *lastly*, We have here a very particular and extraordinary Circumstance, to convince us of the Truth and Certainty of Christ's coming to Judge the World, and that is by his Resurrection from the Dead.

The Miracles which were done by our Saviour, throughout the whole course of his Ministry, carry'd a sufficient Proof and Attestation along with them of the Truths which he taught; for no one could have done those Things which he did, in the most open and publick manner, without the assistance of a Divine Power. Now this being one great Article of the Religion he came to Preach and Establish, that God has appointed a Day, wherein he will Judge the World, it may be said, What need was there of any further Witness to confirm this Article? Or why, when it was sufficiently confirm'd before, was there so great Stress laid on the Resurrection of Christ for the Proof of it? For did not God give *Assurance* to all Men, of the Truths which Christ taught, by every Miracle he work'd, as well as by raising him from the Dead? We grant in general, what is here suppos'd;

pos'd ; But still there was something peculiar in what related to the Resurrection of Christ, which render'd it an Argument of the Truths of his Religion, more proper to persuade the Generality of Men, and to convince Gainsayers, than the rest of his Miracles. For,

1. He had himself appeal'd to this Testimony as one great Proof and Characteristick of his divine Mission and Authority. *Destroy this Temple,* says he, *and in three Days I will raise it up,* John ij. 19. And therefore, besides that his Resurrection was a miraculous and extraordinary Event, exceeding the Powers of Nature, it was an Argument of his being inspir'd with a Prophetick Spirit ; and that God, who alone appropriates to himself the Knowledge of future Events, was in this Respect also *with him.*

2. The Caution which the *Jews* us'd to prevent, if possible, the Resurrection of Christ, gave the greater Force to the Arguments we draw in Proof of our Holy Religion from it. Whatever Pretence they might have made, as some of them do this Day, of his stealing a certain Magical Name out of the Temple, by Virtue of which, all his other Miracles were perform'd, yet when he had been dead for the Space of three Days in the Grave, and was no longer capable of employing, or pronouncing that pretended Charm, it could not be suppos'd of any further Use or Operation to him. So that his very Enemies, who would fasten so Chimerical an Imputation upon him, must confess at least, that his Resurrection could not be effected by it, but that he was rais'd by a Power truly Divine.

3. Again,

3. Again, whereas it might have been objected, that his other Miracles were done before People of obscure and mean Circumstances, before a company of illiterate *Galileans*, and the credulous Multitude, upon whom it is no difficult Matter for Men of Parts and Dexterity at any time to impose; tho' this Objection is easily answer'd, from the publick manner of our Saviour's working his Miracles, and his propounding them afterwards to the Examination of his greatest Enemies, the *Pharisees*; yet in his Resurrection, the very Ground of these Surmises is quite remov'd. There could be no Artifice used on so remarkable and extraordinary an Occasion. His Disciples had withdrawn themselves, and could therefore be no Accomplices with him in it; His dead Body was watch'd by a *Roman* Guard, consisting of Sixty Men, and they were strictly charg'd upon their Duty, in order to prevent any Attempt that might be made towards the recovering of it.

It was pretended indeed, but there could not have been a more ridiculous or weak Pretence, that the *Guard* slept, and gave the Disciples of Christ an Opportunity of Stealing his Body away. What! Not one Man among so many awake, under so strict a Charge, and after they had been forewarn'd of such an Attempt: This is altogether unaccountable. And yet supposing the Report of the Soldiers had been really true, and the Disciples of Christ had undiscover'd stolen his Body away, still as it was his *dead* Body, and had lien so long in the Grave, the *Jews*, I say, even upon this Concession, could not have objected against his being raised from the Dead, by the Power of God, who alone
has

has the Key of the Grave in his Hand. And therefore,

4. There is something in the very Nature of the Thing it self, apt to persuade Men from the Resurrection of Christ, that the Doctrines which he taught were true, and that he was the Messiah, the Son of God.

For tho' every Miracle is above the ordinary Course and Powers of Nature, and supposes certain Changes of Bodies, which cannot be accounted for, according to the standing and establish'd Order of Things; yet where all the bodily Powers of a Man are render'd incapable of acting, and all the Springs of Life are intirely broken, it still seems less conceivable, how he should either be able to work any Change upon other Bodies, or to restore his own Body again to Life.

For these and many more Reasons, which might be mention'd, I do not doubt it is, that tho' the Apostles appeal to the other Miracles of our Saviour, for the Truth of his Religion; yet his Resurrection is not only attested after a more circumstantial Manner, but set, *as it were*, at the Head of all his wondrous Works. It is upon this Account, that the Apostles on all Occasions, and in all their Writings, insisted so much on the Article of Christ's Resurrection. And accordingly we are told, That *with great Power they gave Witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus*, Acts iv. 33. And Rom. i. 4. *He was declar'd to be the Son of God, with Power, by his Resurrection from the Dead.* As if the eternal Power and Godhead, on this Occasion, had been exerted after a more eminent and surprising Manner.

I have

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I have now gone thro' the several Particulars I propos'd to speak to; it remains, that we should consider what Improvements may be made of what has been said. And,

1st. If God has appointed a Day, wherein he will judge the World, let us have it often in our Thoughts, and carefully practice the Duties preparative to it. For it is upon the Account we shall then be able to give of our Conduct in this probationary State, that our Happiness or Misery to all Eternity will depend. And if we do but now forecast to secure an Interest against that great and final Day of Retribution, it is of no great Importance to us, what becomes of all the little Interests and Designs of this Life. It is acknowledg'd, that as the Advantages of this World may be render'd in many Respects subservient to the Ends of Religion, and particularly of that great and important Duty, *Charity*, they are very desirable. This being the Duty, concerning which our Lord at the Day of Judgment more peculiarly represents himself calling us to Account. And tho' we cannot conclude from hence, that there is any thing of Merit, in doing even all the Good we possibly can to all Persons; Yet so much at least we may conclude, that there is something highly pleasing to God, and the Son of God, in such Sacrifices; And that nothing will enable us to stand with so much Confidence and Assurance before our Judge, as the Remembrance of our good Works in this kind. How full of Consolation, infinitely beyond all the Consolations this deceitful World can afford, will the Benediction of Christ then be to all those, who by duly employing the Blessings of
this

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this Life, have been careful to entitle themselves to it. *Come ye Blessed of my Father inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the Foundation of the World. For I was Hungry, and you gave me Meat; Thirsty, and you gave me Drink; Naked, and you Clothed me, Mat. xxv. 34, 35.*

There is no Duty whatever, which the Consideration of that dreadful Account we must one Day make, is not proper to excite us to the Practise of, as on the other Hand there is no Sin, which it has not a direct and very powerful Influence to restrain us from; But I have chosen more particularly to instance in the great Duty of Christian Beneficence, and to insinuate the Danger of neglecting it; because our Saviour in describing the Last Judgment, represents himself as making Inquiry into our past Actions, only with Reference to these two Articles. So that when we draw any Practical Uses from this Doctrine of a Judgment to come, an Exhortation to Christians to shew Mercy here, as they hope to find Mercy at the last, seems necessarily to arise from the Method, wherein the Judge of the World has declar'd he will then proceed.

2dly. If God has appointed a Day, wherein he will judge the World, *in Righteousness*; then it highly concerns us, as we expect to stand in Judgment before him, to take care, that we live and dye in a holy and *righteous* State. For to judge the World in Righteousness, is to judge, whether according to the immutable and eternal Distinctions of *Right* and *Wrong*, we have chosen the better Part; or when we speak to Christians, whether we have practis'd the Rules of Holy Living, as laid down by our Blessed Saviour

Saviour in there Gospel. There is no other Notion of Righteousness, whereby we can judge of our Spiritual State or Condition here, or according to which we shall have Judgment finally pass'd upon us. So our Lord himself declares, *John xij. 48. The Word that I have spoken unto you, the same shall judge all Men at the last.*

If our Consciences then give us this Testimony, that we have liv'd in sincere Obedience to the Word, that Christ has spoken; such an Obedience, I mean, as consists with the invincible Frailties human Nature, and the Conditions of Repentance, then we may have Confidence towards God, and stand erect in that great and awful Day of Trial before him. But if the Righteous themselves, when they reflect on their many Miscarriages and Defects, are sometimes apt to entertain misgiving Apprehensions, that they shall scarcely be sav'd; where will those who have given no Evidence of their Conversion, *Where will the Sinner and Ungodly then appear?* But,

3dly. Since our Blessed Saviour, in speaking of the last Judgment, is pleas'd more peculiarly to stile himself the *Son of Man*: This Consideration will mightily fortify all true Penitents, against those black and desponding Thoughts, which are sometimes apt to arise in the Minds of very good Men. How great or numerous soever our Sins have been, yet if we have humbled our selves before God, and truly repented of them, we know that the Blood of Jesus Christ is sufficient to expiate their Guilt: And he who shed his Blood for us, we may, with all Deference to the Rectitude of his Laws, assure our selves, will not lose the saving Effects of it,
if

if there be a Possibility of applying them, since God has appointed, that we must all of us appear one Day in Judgment before him; what stronger Argument are we capable of conceiving, that infinite Wisdom it self could have propos'd in order to support us under the Apprehension of so awful an Appearance, than that the Saviour of Mankind shall himself be their Judge, and visibly judge them in the Person of Man?

But then it must be confess'd on the other Hand, that this very Consideration is not without *Terror* to wicked and impenitent Sinners, for surely no Award of Justice can be so insupportable, as that which comes from the very Seat of Mercy; In a Word, no Condemnation, when we appear before the Tribunal of God, can be imagin'd so dreadful and astonishing, as that which is to be denounced by *the Son of Man*.

4thly. and *Lastly*, As by the Resurrection of Christ, we have a more full and express Assurance of a future Judgment, than we could have had from the mere Light of Reason, or what the *Deist* calls Natural Religion. Let this Consideration excite us to walk worthy of so bright and glorious an Evidence. Let us resolve to live, not as Persons, that have some probable Notions and Conjectures about such a thing; but as Men, who fully, and in earnest believe, that we must one Day appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ; that every one may receive the Things done in the Body, *according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad*.

And indeed, if the Belief of a future Account to be given of our Actions, do not produce this Effect of holy Living in us, it had been better for us if Christ had never risen from the Dead,

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in order to confirm the Truths of his holy Religion, and this of a Judgment to come in particular. For the very Revelation concerning it, without its proper Use and Influence upon us, will serve the more to aggravate our Guilt, and *increase our Damnation*. It is but reasonable, that in Proportion to the Degrees of Light and Knowledge, which the Gospel dispenses to Men; The Motives to Obedience, and in Consequence, the Punishment of their Disobedience ought to arise; So our Lord himself has determin'd: *This, says he, is their Condemnation, that Light is come into the World; and Men love Darknes rather than Light, because their Deeds are Evil.*

What remains therefore, but that this Doctrine of a future Judgment, so evidently confirm'd by the Resurrection of Christ, should from a firm and full Conviction of it, suitable to so clear an Evidence, enforce the Apostle's Advice upon every one of us; And teach us, *that denying Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present World; looking for that blessed Hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, Tit. ij. 12, 13. Amen.*

S E R M O N IX.

What we are to understand by a good Conscience; and how it may be attain'd; with the Blessing of it.

A C T S xxiv. 16.

And herein do I exercise my self to have always a Conscience void of Offence towards God, and towards Men.

A Conscience is one of those Terms which are common in the World, but of a very doubtful and uncertain, and sometimes of a dangerous Signification.

Some Men understand nothing by it, but a blind and heady Zeal for the Opinion they espouse, which perhaps they have been confirm'd in by the Prejudice of Education, or

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have taken up out of some Motive of worldly Interest or Vanity.

Others mean nothing by it, but a scrupulous Tenderneſs about Things of little or no Moment; *Things*, conſider'd in themſelves, which are not of the Subſtance, but only to be conſider'd as decent Circumſtances of Religion: Which yet Conſcience is many times more nice and tender about, than the moſt weighty and important of religious Duties. Such is the Conſcience of thoſe Men, who make a Scruple of a Ceremony, and none of a Schiſm; who think they do God good Service, by breaking the Peace and Unity of his Church, and cauſing Differences and Diviſions among Chriſtians, upon the Account of Things, which are confeſſedly in their own Nature, *Indifferent*.

Thus we ſee Conſcience, according to the different Tempers, Paſſions, and Prejudices of Men, is made to ſignify very different Things: And whereas 'tis the Character of a good and well-inform'd Conſcience, to be void of Offence towards God and towards Men; as ſome Perſons underſtand Conſcience, nothing is more injurious or offenſive, either to God or Men.

That I may contribute, by God's aſſiſtance, to rectify theſe dangerous and miſtaken Notions of Conſcience, and at the ſame time perſuade you, after the Example of our Apoſtle here in the Text, to endeavour after a good and well-inform'd Conſcience. I ſhall diſcourſe on the Words in the following Order.

I. I ſhall enquire what is meant by a *Conſcience*, void of Offence towards God and towards Men.

II. I

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II. I shall lay down some Rules and Directions, in order to our obtaining such a Conscience.

III. and *Lastly*, Shall use some proper Motives and Arguments to enforce those Directions.

I. As to the first Enquiry, what is meant by a *Conscience*, void of Offence towards God and towards Men. We may easily come to a Resolution, if we do but consider what is the Rule of Conscience, or how we ought to proceed in regulating the Judgments we make of our own Actions? For not only the Reason of the Thing, but the very Word *Conscience*, in its proper Signification imports, that there ought to be some Law or Rule, by which our Conduct is to be try'd, and the Error or Rectitude of it determin'd.

When we know that our Actions have been conformable to such a Law or Rule, we have a good and well-inform'd, and inoffensive Conscience; but if we depart from our Rule, how Specious soever our Pretences may be, of a good Intention or Zeal for God's Service, and the Interests of Religion, in order to palliate, or the better to Set-off a sinful Action; yet the Principle, upon which we Act, cannot properly be call'd Conscience; for Conscience, in the proper Sense of the Word, always supposes a Conformity between the Rule and the Action. It is therefore only private Judgment or *Opinion* upon which we proceed in such Cases; and strictly speaking, can no more be call'd Conscience, than I can be said to *concur* with another Per-

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son in any Design or Action, wherein I directly oppose him.

Yet it must be granted, That as Men are willing to impose upon themselves by false Names and Appearances, and to call that Conscience, wherein they Act in direct Opposition to their Rule; the Apostle, of my Text, is sometimes pleas'd to express himself in Compliance with this ordinary, but improper way of Speaking. Accordingly he represents those who persist obstinately in their Errors and Delusions, as *having their Consciences Sear'd with a hot Iron*, 1 Tim. iv. 2. And he elsewhere makes it the Character of Unbelievers, that *even their Mind and Conscience is defil'd*, Tit. i. 15.

There is a Necessity indeed of this Distinction, concerning Conscience, in a strict, and in a popular and a larger Sense, to account for that very Plea of our Apostle (*Acts xxij. 1.*) of his having liv'd in *all good Conscience* towards God, until that Day.

For 'tis evedient, if we are to understand Conscience, according to its genuine Signification, of a Man's acting agreeably to a known and certain Rule; the Apostle, in this Sense, could not be said to have had a good Conscience in persecuting the Church of God; because in so doing, his Zeal was not according to Knowledge, but he acted ignorantly, and besides his Rule. By Conscience therefore, he could here intend no more than his private Judgment or Opinion; which, tho' in some measure, and in proportion to our Weakness or Ignorance, it may excuse an irregular or sinful Action, yet will by no means justify it, as appears so evidently from the Case of our Apostle himself,
that

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that I need only refer you to the two following Passages concerning it, for intire Satisfaction in this Point, 1 Cor. xv. 9. Titus i. 13.

Whatever Pretensions Men make to Religion, how Conscientious soever they apprehend themselves to be, or would appear to others, yet if they do not regulate their Actions by the Law of God; we may, notwithstanding, say of them, in a strict and *proper* Sense, according to the forecited Words of the Apostle, that *their very Mind and Conscience is defil'd.*

Now this Law of God, by which our Actions are to be regulated, may be consider'd either as that natural Law written on the Table of our Hearts, for so indeed it can only be consider'd, with respect to Heathens and Infidels, who never had the Means of being instructed in the Fruits of reveal'd Religion, or else it may be understood of the reveal'd Will of God, discover'd to us in the Holy Scriptures.

In most Cases indeed, we need only put the Question to our own Hearts, and they will direct us what we are to do, and what to forbear. The great Lines of our Duty towards God and Man, are so plain and visible to the Eye of natural Reason, that those who do not see them, must be sunk into the last degree of Corruption, or given up to a judicial Blindness of Mind.

The Apostle observes this concerning the Heathens, who had no other Light to direct them, but that of their own Minds. *Having not the Law* (says he) *they do by Nature the Things contained in the Law, and are a Law unto themselves: Which shew the Work of the Law writ-*

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ten in their Hearts, their Consciences also bearing Witness, and their Thoughts the mean while Accusing, or else Excusing one another, Rom. ij. 14, 15.

But because in this degenerate State of human Nature, the Faculties of our Souls are Disorder'd and out of Tune; so that we do not always see the Truths of Religion in a clear Light, or Reason justly concerning them; therefore God has been pleas'd to make a plain and standing Revelation of his Will to us in the Holy Scriptures.

The wisest of Men may deceive us, or be deceived themselves, in their way of Reasoning upon the Principles and Duties of Religion; but the Holy Scriptures, which were dictated by the Wisdom and Reason of God, cannot (if we follow the Light of them) mislead us. We have now a sure Word of Prophecy to direct us, both what we are to believe and do, and whose Directions, if we follow, we are secure from Error, and cannot do amiss.

'Tis our Happiness, and which we cannot be too thankful to God for, that we can now appeal from our own fallible Speculations and Methods of Reasoning, *to the Law, and to the Testimony: And if we speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no Light in us, Isaiah viij. 20.*

So that upon the whole Matter, to have a Conscience void of Offence, is to act conformably and *knowingly*, according to that Law which God has prescrib'd as the Rule of our Actions. If upon examining our Conduct by this Law, we find there is a good Agreement and Correspondence between them; then we may safely con-

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conclude we have done what we ought, and that our own Minds have no Offence to reproach us for; either towards God or towards Men. But if we have done any thing, we had no Warrant or Authority for from the Word of God, or from the known Reason of the Thing, where possibly we may have no express and *particular* Rule in the Scriptures, in this Case, whatever Conscience we pretend (if it may in a large Sense be call'd Conscience) yet it is in truth, and evil, and defiling, and will in the Event, when God pleases to open our Eyes, as he did those of our Apostle, prove to us a *condemning* Conscience.

This ought to be carefully consider'd by those, who either out of Humour, or Prejudice, or Curiosity, or any other private and indirect Motive, take up an Opinion without examining it by the Rule of God's Word, and then pretend Conscience for persisting in such an Opinion. If Men might be allow'd such a Liberty as this, the Distinction of Virtue and Vice would soon be confuted; Evil would become good, and Good evil.

But the Errors of Men do not alter the Nature of Things, or Cancel the Obligation they are under to obey the Commands of God. And tho' I will not say, that such a Conscience, or more properly speaking, Opinion, does not oblige a Man, while he really believes himself in the Right, yet I cannot say, that such a Conscience or Opinion, call it what you please, is void of Offence; for 'tis certainly offensive to God, and may possibly too in some Cases, gives just occasion of Scandal and Offence to Men.

And

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And the Reason why an erroneous Conscience will not excuse Men before God, appears evident from hence; that a wrong Principle which leads to any sinful or dangerous Practise, must in some Measure at least proceed from a voluntary Ignorance, and in the same Measure and Proportion from a Man's own Fault or Neglect.

For either the Scriptures are plain and clear to direct the Practise of Men, or they are not; if they are not, how shall we acquit the Wisdom of God in them? A Rule which is not sufficiently plain and clear in order to the End it proposes, is in effect no Rule at all. But if the Holy Scriptures be (as most certainly they are) sufficiently plain and intelligible to all Christians, both with respect to the Principles and Duties of Christianity, in the Use of the common and ordinary Means of Instruction, which I all along suppose, then no Christian can err, especially in any fundamental Point of Conscience, but from a culpable Neglect of those Means, and consequently through his own Default. But why should the Clergy inveigh so much against Errors, or erroneous Practises, for which Men pretend Conscience? Are not all Men at liberty to be of what Opinion or Persuasion they please, provided it be such, as gives no Umbrage to the State? Why then should good and peaceable Subjects be reflected upon for following what appears to them the true Light, and serving God in what Place, and after what Manner, they like best? So long as the Government has thought fit to grant a Toleration to tender and scrupulous Consciences,
why

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why may'nt they claim the Benefit of it, and do that which seems right in their own Eyes?

To these Queries I shall give a short, but satisfactory Answer by the Proof of this one Proposition (namely) “ That no Power on Earth, “ I might have said in Heaven, can give Liberty of Conscience to Men in the Sense, wherein 'tis commonly, but very abusively taken; “ that is, a Liberty to Men to be of any Opinion, to set up what Forms of Worship, or “ join even themselves to what Communion “ they please.

I'm sensible in whose Presence I speak; yet am persuaded, that the Perfection of the Divine Nature will not suffer that glorious Being, in whose Presence we all are to grant Men such a *wretched* Liberty.

For God cannot deny himself, or authorize Men to act contrary to the eternal Reason and Order of Things, and the Rules founded upon them, which he has prescrib'd in his reveal'd Word for our Conduct.

And therefore we ought to distinguish between Toleration and Liberty of Conscience; Toleration in the most natural and obvious Sense of it implies a Forbearance of Persons liable to Punishment, and consequently supposes, that the Persons so tolerated are notwithstanding in one Degree or other Criminal.

'Tis true, human Powers may suspend, or for wise Reasons remit the Punishment due to the greatest Offenders; but this does not in the least alter the Nature of the Offence; nor can any tolerable Reason be assign'd, why it should.

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And this I humbly conceive is all that was intended by the Act of Toleration (namely)
 “ To free Men from those Penalties they were
 “ formerly liable to, upon the Account of their
 “ Separation from the Establish’d Church, and
 “ which perhaps were sometimes executed with
 “ too much Rigour. But to argue from hence, that the Government hereby authorizes or approves an uncontroll’d Liberty of Conscience, is, as if I should infer, ’tis lawful for a Man to be proud or ungrateful, because there is no Law of the Land, which directly punishes Pride or Ingratitude; but as to these, and a great many other Vices, which do not immediately tend to disturb the publick Peace, leave every Man to be directed by the Law of God. And if any Man will duly and impartially examin his Conscience by this Law, let him separate from the Establish’d Church, if he can.

Thus I have consider’d in general what it is to have a Conscience void of Offence, without descending to shew the particular Obligations of Conscience, with respect to God and Man: But the Holy Scriptures (as I have made appear) being the Rule by which our Judgment in Cases of Conscience are to be determin’d, and by whose Decisions we must stand or fall, ’twill be sufficient to direct you to these Divine Oracles (wherein the whole Duty of Man is so fully and particularly explain’d) in order to try and examin your selves, how far you are come up to the exemplary and strict Piety of *St. Paul* in exercising your selves with him, to have always a Conscience void of Offence towards God and towards Man.

And

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And this brings me in,

2. The Second Place, to lay down some Rules and Directions in order to our obtaining such a Conscience.

1. And the first thing I would recommend to this End, is a careful and diligent Reading of the Holy Scriptures. Our Obligation to this Duty does indeed naturally arise from what has been said already. For if the Scriptures be the Rule, by which our Judgments in Matters of Conscience were to be inform'd and directed, and from which we cannot depart, then the only way to have a Conscience void of Offence, is to consult and apply this Rule to our particular Cases and Circumstances.

But there is also this further Advantage in our being much conversant in the Holy Scriptures, that they are not only a Rule to instruct Men in their *Duty*, but a powerful Means to persuade them to a conscientious Discharge of it.

As the saving Truths and Principles of Religion are only to be learn'd from them, so they furnish us with the most strong and invincible Arguments to enforce the practical Duties we owe both to God and Man.

The Stile and Manner of Expression in the Holy Scriptures have a secret Force and Energy in them, beyond what we meet with in the most celebrated of human or prophane Authors: But *the Matter* of them, and the Motives whereby they speak to the Hearts and Consciences of Men are such as could never, in several Particulars, have enter'd into the Heart of *any* Man to conceive.

And therefore Holy *David* in several Passages attributes to the Holy Scriptures, not only a
Power

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Power of enlightning the Understanding, but of moving and regulating the Will and Affections.

The Law of the Lord is perfect, converting the Soul; the Testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the Simple. The Statutes of the Lord are right, rejoycing the Heart, the Commandment of the Lord is pure enlightning the Eyes, Psal. xix. 7, 8.

And this Power of the Holy Scriptures to open the Hearts, as well as the Understanding of Men discovers it self in the good Effects it often has, even upon those Persons, who are the least dispos'd to comply with it.

Felix, who by marrying *Drusilla*, another Man's Wife, and his committing much Cruelty and Injustice in the Administration of his Government, discover'd that the Truths of Religion had very little Influence upon him, yet was so powerfully awaken'd by the Word of God preach'd to him by our Apostle, that the sensible Conviction he felt in his own Mind, of his Sins, and which indeed visibly discover'd it self to others, might, had he improv'd it as he ought, have been the happy Occasion of his exercising a true and hearty Contrition for them.

Who are usually more violent in their Passions, and luxuriant in their Pleasures, than rash and inconsiderate Youth? And yet even such Persons if they will but attentively read and consider the Law of God, cannot but find effectual and unanswerable Arguments in it to make them turn to him, and reclaim them from walking any longer in the Ways of their Hearts, and in the Sight of their Eyes.

And

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And therefore the *Psalmist* having put the Question, wherewith shall a young Man cleanse his Way, or preserve his Purity and Innocence? Immediately answers (and it is an Answer I wish all the young Persons would consider and apply) *even by taking heed thereto according to God's Word*, Psal. cxix. 9. which therefore in the New Testament is very significantly stil'd by *St. Paul, the Power of God unto Salvation*, Rom. i. 16.

And indeed if so many excellent Things were spoken by the Royal Prophet concerning the Efficacy of the Law, in order to reform Sinners; which was only a Shadow of good Things to come, and in comparison of the Gospel, but as the Dawning of the Day to the Brightness of the Meridian Sun, how much more effectual to this End must the Writings of the New Testament be, wherein the Substance is exhibited? Wherein the Light of the glorious Gospel of Christ shines, and the Grace of God is shed forth upon us, so much *more abundantly*.

Well therefore might the Apostle argue, that the Word of God worketh effectually in those that believe, *1 Thess. ij. 13.* and that it is the Sword of the Spirit, *Ephes. vi. 17.* But after what manner the Consciences of Sinners are sometimes penetrated by it, the Apostle explains more particularly, and in a very sensible manner, *Heb. iv. 12. The Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any Two-edged Sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder the Soul and Spirit.*

When the Terrors of the Lord therefore are denounc'd against Sin, that our Minds may have nothing to challenge or reproach us for; and
above

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above all, that we may not be oppress'd and confounded with the Weight of an evil Conscience, heighten'd by a long Habit of Sin, and falling upon us all at once. Let us have the Holy Scriptures frequently in our Hands, and let us as frequently examin our Hearts by them, to see if there be *any* way of Wickedness in them. And then I say we cannot fail, if we do not shut our Eyes against the Light, or wilfully reject the Motions of God's Grace, to have with St. Paul, *always a Conscience void of Offence, towards God, and towards Men.* Especially,

2. In the next Place, if we take care of the very first Motions and Beginnings of Sin. For, in this corrupt State of human Nature our Innocence is generally so weakly guarded, that it is for the most part, much safer and more adviseable to prevent a Siege, than to run the Hazard of an Attack. Or if we happen to be attack'd, which is sometimes unavoidable, what we have to do is to push and repel the Enemy, with all the Vigour we can. If we give way in the least to him, we know not what further Advances he may make, in Proportion to the Ground he gains, to be sure we must lose: And therefore if we have used so little Caution, as to give him any Advantage, our Care must be as soon as possible to retrieve our Error. For thus it is with Sinners in all Cases; when they indulge to any criminal Passion or Design, they know not when, or where they will make a stand. If a Man be running down a steep Precipice, he cannot stop himself just where he pleases. The first Move we make in a sinful Course casts us forward upon the next, and so
on,

on, till we are hurry'd beyond the Bounds we first set our selves, and further perhaps than we could have at first imagin'd.

I might more particularly observe to you the gradual Advances and spreading Malignity of Sin from the Examples of *David* and *Peter*. Of the former, who by a criminal and indiscreet Look, was betray'd to commit the two great Sins of Adultery and Murder, and of the later, who from denying Christ, was drawn on to confirm his Denial, with bitter Oaths and Imprecations.

But what I have said, without further Enlargement upon it, is I hope sufficient to shew us how strictly careful we ought to be, if we would have a Conscience void of Offence, not to be guilty of any sinful Compliances in any kind; which like a Whirl-pool are so apt, when once we come within their Verge, to wind us in more and more, till by Degrees we become utterly unable to recover our selves.

3dly, I shall but lay down one Direction more in order to our having and preserving a Conscience void of Offence; and it is this: *That we should frequently state Accounts between God and our Consciences, and inquire what Sins we have committed, and what Duties we have done or omitted to do.*

All those, who have prescrib'd the Rules of holy Living, have laid this down as a fundamental One, that we should constantly set apart some proper time for calling our own Ways to Remembrance, and searching the Ground of our Hearts, which are so apt after our strictest Examination to deceive us. To this End is that Command of the Apostle, 2 Cor. xiiij. 5. *Exa-*

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main your selves, whether you be in the Faith: Prove your own selves. He doubles the Charge, and to shew the great Importance and Necessity of the Duty, uses two Expressions which signify much the same thing.

So again, *Gal. vi. 4. Let every Man prove his own Works, and then shall he have Rejoycing in himself alone.* And indeed without taking this Review of our selves, we shall be very apt to forget what the State and Condition of our Souls are; what Improvements or Escapes we have made, and what are the present Defects we labour under; and so can have no true Foundation for any inward Complacency or Satisfaction of Mind, tho' we may easily *delude* our selves with a false Apprehension of our being in a State of Grace and Favour with God. And therefore for want of calling themselves to a strict and severe Account for their Actions, very wicked Men seem many times as secure and easy to themselves, as if all Things were well with them, and they had nothing to account for.

But this I say is a false and delusory Peace of Mind, which will fail them when they stand the most need of it at the Hour of Death, and in the Day of Judgment. For as the Apostle argues, *Gal. vi. 3. If a Man think himself something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.* Ἐαυτὸν ὁρῶν τινα. He imposes upon his own Mind and Conscience, according to the Testimony of which he ought to judge of himself here, but must certainly be judg'd hereafter.

If upon these Views Men would seriously and frequently take an Account of their own Actions, it would be impossible for them, except they be given up to a judicial Blindness of Mind

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Or Hardness of Heart, to continue any long time in a State of Sin, especially in any dangerous sinful Habit. Such an Examination could not fail of obliging them to quit their Evil Courses, and bringing them Repentance. This was the Method holy *David* took; and the Effect it had upon him was answerable. *I thought*, says he, *on my Ways, and I turn'd my Feet unto God's Testimonies*; and no doubt if we observ'd the same Rule, it would, by the Grace of God have the same Effect upon us too.

'Tis from a Sense of the great spiritual Advantages arising from this Duty, that our Royal Prophet so earnestly prays God in another Place to direct him in the Discharge of it; *Psal. cxxxix. 22, 23. Try me, O God, and seek the Ground of my Heart, prove me, and examin my Thoughts, look well if there be any way of Wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Having, according to the Method propos'd, laid down some general Rules and Directions in order to our obtaining a Conscience void of Offence. I shall in the Third and last Place enforce them by some proper Motives and Arguments. This I shall do by considering the great Blessing and Advantage of having a Conscience void of Offence, both with respect this World, and the World to come. And,

1. With respect to this World, there is nothing can afford us any true, solid or lasting Satisfaction without a good Conscience. This the Wise Man, (who pronounc'd all the other seeming Satisfaction of Life, Vanity and Vexation of Spirit) tells us is a continual Feast, *Prov. xv. 15. The Pleasures of Sin are always dash'd with one impure bitter Ingredient or other,*
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besides

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besides that they are of a short Duration, and go off with an ungrateful Relish: But the Pleasures on the other Hand arising from the Conscience of our having done what we ought, as they are pure and unmix'd, so they last as long as the Remembrance of those Actions which occasion'd them.

Wicked Men it is granted may put on an Air of Chearfulness, and appear very easy to themselves, as if they felt no Pain, or had none to fear; but then they only act in Disguise, while they carry Guilt about them; while they know nothing of those solid and rational Delights, which naturally result from the Conscience of of a well-spent Life, and from it only. We ought (whatever they pretend) to look upon their Chearfulness and Gaiety of Temper, as mere Force and Constraint: For that even in the midst of Laughter there is to such Persons *sadness of Heart*: 'Twas the Observation of one, who by giving himself up to know Madness and Folly, and having the greatest Opportunities of knowing them, was the best able to judge in the Case, *Eccles. vij. 3.*

Some sudden and melancholy Thoughts of what will follow, or the Awe of a Just and Almighty God, in whose Presence wicked Men are (they know what I say to be true) will now and then arise to disturb their seeming Happiness and Enjoyments.

But a good Man! A Man that has a Conscience void of Offence! A Man that is at Peace with God, with himself, and as much as in him lies, with all the World; what has he to fear, or what can interrupt the free and even Current of his Enjoyments? Why! This Man is
the

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the very Reverse of the other. *In the midst of Sadness* (if I may so term any outward Misfortune or Calamity of Life which befalls him) his Heart is chearful, and the Testimony of a good Conscience, if it do not wholly remove the Sense of them, will in a great Measure sweeten and alleviate all external Evils to him.

'Tis a Happiness indeed, would they make a right use of it (which God knows they do not always do) when Men enjoy the good Things as we call them of this Life; and all Things go smoothly on with them, and succeed to their reasonable Designs and Expectations. But *after all*, the true, solid and substantial Happiness of a Man is not to be sought for from without, but within himself; in that Ease and Freedom and Complacency of Mind, which arise from the Reflection of his having acted as became him, and liv'd up to the Order and Perfection of his Nature. When his Conscience truly makes him this Report, what greater Happiness on this side Heaven can we suppose him capable of? What, I say, are all the uncertain, imperfect, transient Enjoyments? What are all the fading Glories of this deceitful World, to the pure and unmix'd Joys which continually spring up in the Heart of such a Man?

'Twas this Testimony of a good Conscience which inspir'd St. Paul with so much Courage and Resolution under all his Sufferings, and render'd them not only easy, but even Matter of Joy and Triumph to him. *Bonds and Afflictions*, says he, *abide me; but none of these Things move me; so that I might finish my Course with Joy.* That is with the joyful Report of a good Conscience, *Acts xx. 23.* And again, he tells the

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Romans (Chap. v. 2, 3.) that he and all good conscientious Christians, who have Peace with God, rejoyce in the Hope of the Glory of God, and not only so, but that they *Glory* in Tribulation also.

Had we with this Blessed Apostle a Conscience void of Offence, which by the Grace of God we all may have, it would be an unspeakable Comfort to us under all the troublesome Accidents and Disappointments of this Life. Whatever our Condition were in it, we might then say with him, *2 Cor. i. 12. Our rejoycing is this, even the Testimony of a good Conscience, that with Simplicity and godly Sincerely we have had our Conversation in the World.* And indeed if we can truly and sincerely say this, we ought not to be much concern'd at what befalls us in a Life, which is not design'd for a perfect State of Happiness, but only to prepare and train us up for it; and if God in his Wisdom sees fit, that thro' much Tribulation we should enter into his Kingdom; I am sure we shall at the last have no Reason to complain.

2. But this leads me to represent to you in the next Place the great Blessing and Advantage of a good Conscience with respect to another World, and that both as it is a Condition of our future Happiness, and a necessary Qualification for it.

1st. As it is a Condition and an indispensable one too, of our future Happiness. In the Day when God shall judge the Secrets of Men by Jesus Christ, We, and the whole World must be try'd before him for our Actions done in the Body, whether Good or Evil, and be acquitted or condemn'd according as our Consciences bear Wit-

Witness for or against us, *Rom. ij. 15, 16.* And therefore our Blessed Saviour, after his familiar Method of instructing us, in the Process of the last Judgment represents himself as a Shepherd separating the Sheep from the Goats; and having made this Distribution of Mankind, he severally appeals to their own Consciences for the Reasonableness and Equity of his Proceedings. He particularly takes Cognizance of the good Works they had done or omitted to do, in Acts of Mercy and Charity, and then proceeds to Sentence. " These, *says he*, that is the Wicked, " whose Consciences condemn them for their " neglect of these Duties, shall go away into " everlasting Punishment; but the Righteous " who have the Answer of a good Conscience " upon these Articles of Enquiry, *into Life Eter-* " *nal.*

Not but that Inquisition will then be made concerning the Discharge or Omission of our Duty in all other Respects. But our Lord is pleased to mention the Duties of Mercy and Charity in particular, because his own Example throughout the whole Course of his Ministry, The brightest Ideas we have of the Divine Perfection, and the Genius of our Holy Religion conspire in so *eminent* a manner, to dispose us to all good and beneficent Actions.

But do we indeed, my Brethren, duly consider what these two different Sentences, which the Judge of the World will then pronounce severally import? What it is to go away into everlasting Punishment, and what into Life Eternal? Oh! most certainly such a Reflection duly improv'd would never suffer us to take

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any Ease or Repose in our own Mind, till we had with the Apostle exercised our selves to have *always* a Conscience void of Offence towards God and towards Man. Especially,

2dly. If we farther consider, that to have a Conscience void of Offence, is not only a Condition, but a necessary Qualification for Heaven. Could we imagine, contrary to what we conclude from the Authority of the Holy Scriptures, that a Person whose Mind and Conscience is *defil'd*, could enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; yet what will he propose to do there? What Communion can there be, between Light and Darknes? What Fellowship could such an unclean Wretch have with the infinitely perfect God, with the Holy Jesus, with the bright and glorious Angels, or even with the Spirits of just Men made perfect?

'Tis not the Company we are in that makes us happy, but an easy State of Mind, with an Agreeableness of Temper; So that a Sinner till his Nature were sanctify'd and renew'd, and his Conscience purg'd from dead Works, could we in Imagination place him there, yet would be miserable and unhappy even in Heaven it self; or rather he would carry a Hell to Heaven along with him.

Alas! What Satisfaction would it be to a Man in a violent Fit of the Gout or Stone to be laid upon a Bed of Roses? As little Satisfaction would a Sinner take in the pure and spiritual Joys of Heaven, without a heavenly Temper and Disposition of Mind.

That

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That all these Considerations may have their due Effect upon us, and effectually excite us to maintain a Conscience void of Offence towards God and towards Man, that so we may have the Sentence, not of Death but of Life continually in our selves, and at last be thought Worthy to enter into the Joy of our Lord. God of his infinite Mercy grant. *Amen.*

S E R-

SERMON X.

The Defects of human Wisdom and Knowledge consider'd in several Instances.

ECCLES. i. 18.

For in much Wisdom is much Grief; and he, that increaseth Knowledge, increaseth Sorrow.

IT may at first View appear very surprizing, that *Solomon* should here speak after so disadvantageous, or rather so discouraging a manner, concerning Wisdom and Knowledge, which in other Places he so earnestly recommends to us the Pursuit of, and from the most powerful and engaging Motives. How for Instance could he have represented by a more lively and beautiful Image the Advantages which attend Wisdom, both with respect to the Life, which now is, and that which is to come, than in the Third Chapter of his Book of *Proverbs*. *Happy is the Man that findeth Wisdom, and the Man that getteth*

seth Understanding; for the Merchandise of it is better, than the Merchandise of Silver and the Gain thereof than fine Gold. She is more precious than Rubies; and all the Things thou can'st desire, are not to be compar'd unto her. Length of Days are in her Right Hand, and in her Left Hand Riches and Honour. She is a Tree of Life to them that lay hold on her, and happy is every one that retaineth her. We have here an Enumeration of the greatest and most valuable Enjoyments of this World, and which command indeed every thing else that is desireable in it; but they are all described as the proper Attendants of Wisdom; and which are only to be found in her Retinue.

The Terms *Solomon* employs in the foregoing Chapter, to represent the Advantages of Knowledge, are also very forcible and persuasive. When Knowledge, says he, is pleasant unto thy Soul or thou, once taste a sensible Delight in the Pursuit of it, Discretion shall preserve thee, Understanding shall keep thee. And then he proceeds to show in variety of Instances, how Knowledge not only contributes to the Preservation of Men from the greatest Evils of Life, but to the promoting of their true Happiness and Tranquility.

There seems to be no other way of reconciling these and several other Passages in the Writings of *Solomon* with the Words of my Text, but by supposing that he speaks in it of Wisdom and Knowledge, not properly consider'd as religious, but as human or civil Endowments; and that the Words are to be taken in this Sense seems directly to follow from the Account which he gives of his past Conduct in the former Verse. *I gave my Heart, says he, to know*

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know Wisdom and to know Madness and Folly; I perceiv'd also that this is Vexation of Spirit. And then he immediately adds, For in much Wisdom is much Grief, and he that increaseth Knowledge, increaseth Sorrow.

I shall make it my Business at present to confirm the Truth of what *Solomon* here observes, both with respect to Wisdom and Knowledge, according to his Notion of them in this Place. And,

First, With respect to Wisdom, which admits of a very distinct Consideration from Knowledge; tho' these Terms are often promiscuously used in Scripture to signify the same thing. For Wisdom in the genuine Sense of the Word is Knowledge reduc'd to Practise, or if you will have it so, the Application of Knowledge to all the proper Ends and Uses for which it is acquir'd. Now the most consummate Wisdom under this Notion of it, as it respects the Regulation of our Conduct or Designs, can only give us probable Hopes of Success, or such as are at the best precarious; and that whether we consider our selves in a private or more publick Capacity.

In either State of Life the great Office of Wisdom is to moderate our Passions, and to direct us how we may best pursue the Ends we propose to our selves by the most just, the most likely and commendable Means. I do not know whether it may be proper to call Wisdom the Guide of Reason, because that is the Sovereign Faculty of human Nature; yet it may be said, that Reason without Wisdom, or to speak more distinctly without *Prudence*, is of much less use to those, who are in many Respects capable of

rea-

reasoning after a clear and exact Manner. And therefore we may observe, that not only very good, but very learned Men, and who are thoroughly skill'd in all the Rules of Logick, yet are sometimes apt to fall into Indiscretions which are not to be examin'd too nicely, even by the Rules of common Life and Behaviour.

But tho' Prudence cannot be allow'd in a strict Sense, superior to Reason, it may be justly stiled the *President* Virtue, which after Reason has determin'd what ought to be done, directs the best and most proper Methods of doing it; and indeed, without such Direction, all the other Virtues, if they do not in some Sort cease to be so, yet lose very much of that Grace and Decorum, which is necessary to preserve their Lustre and Dignity. If it do not sometimes happen, that for want of Prudence, there are good Qualities which by Degrees, especially in weak Minds, degenerate into such Vices, as have at the first View some external Appearance of the contrary Virtues: For so a liberal Disposition, if not well regulated, easily becomes profuse; Covetousness assumes the Name of Frugality, Revenge of Justice, and Pride of Greatness of Mind.

To shew therefore how necessary Prudence is to regulate our Conduct, to form all our Designs, and give Laws to all our Actions; *Solomon* makes it the Character of Wisdom, that Wisdom wherein true Piety and Religion consists; that Wisdom which renders us *acceptable to God* and *approv'd of Men*, that it dwells with Prudence. *Prov. viij. 12.* He tells us to the same Purpose, *Chap. xiv. 8.—15.* That *the Wisdom of the Prudent is to understand his Way, —and to look well*

well to his going. There being innumerable Actions good and innocent consider'd in themselves, which yet under certain Circumstances become highly inexpedient, and sometimes really offensive; and even where we are oblig'd to act, the Manner, the Place and Time of Action contribute very much towards attaining the End we propose. This is the proper Season therefore for Prudence to exert her self, to issue out her Orders, and see that they be faithfully and exactly observ'd.

Under these Advantages it might be expected that a Man should be able to effect whatever he designs with much greater Facility. For where Providence does not immediately interpose in the Affairs of human Life, the ordinary Methods of Success, and which commonly succeed, are those which Prudence directs; and yet it is very ordinary for Men of great Dexterity, Address and Penetration; and for those I may add, whose Measures are form'd upon long Experience and Observation, to meet with very great Difficulties, and sometimes Disappointments, even when they come to execute such Projects as appear'd to them the best concerted. Indeed considering the fluctuating State of Things in this World; the Variety of unforeseen Incidents which necessarily arise from it, the different Tempers, Passions and Inclinations of Men, and with Respect to all which they are often observ'd to differ from themselves, it is not possible that any sure and standing Scheme of Success should be laid down by the most artful or subtle Men. To produce but one Instance in Reference to what I have observ'd; In our Applications to any Person it is a Maxim of Human

Human Prudence that we should consider the Passion whereby he is govern'd, and endeavour to put it in a Motion, that pleases him. It is obvious enough after what manner we are to address our selves to the Covetous or the Proud; and yet at the Time of our applying to them, it is possible that their Covetousness and Vanity may not be so much excited, as at other times, or that these Passions have been already retain'd by other Persons; or have themselves given way to some foreign and sudden Passion arising from any extraordinary Accident, or perhaps to mere Caprice and Humour, from which great Men are not always observ'd to be perfectly exempt. In a Word, whatever Human Prudence may design in any Case, we are to consider, that God has reserv'd the Disposition of all Events to himself, and that if he had not in so evident and visible a manner establish'd this his Prerogative, Men of loose Principles would be under much stronger Temptation to question whether there be a *God*; at least, whether there be a *God* that *judgeth* in the *Earth*.

It must be own'd Matter of sensible Regret to Men when they conduct themselves in the Pursuit of what they desire by all the Rules of Prudence; yet to find their Designs by one unexpected Accident or other at last baffled or defeated. What for Example can be more affecting to Men of superiour Understanding and Abilities in Human Affairs, than that after all the proper Expedients they can employ, they are not always able to procure to themselves or their Dependents; I do not say the ordinary Comforts or Conveniences, but the common Supports of Life? What again can be more mortifying to
Men

Men of the brightest Talents, such as are proper to draw the Eyes of the World upon them, and procure them universal Love and Esteem, than to see themselves left in Obscurity, and at a vast Distance, by those, who seem'd neither born nor form'd by Education for so unequal a Superiority? And yet the Observation of *Solomon* in his Age holds still good, That *Bread is not always to the Wise, nor Favour to Men of Skill.* If any thing can add to the uneasy Reflections which are apt to arise in the Minds of Men from such Disappointments, it must be this, that their most just and reasonable Designs do not only prove abortive, but they sometimes find themselves condemn'd as imprudent, for acting, and that with necessary Regard to the Circumstances they were under, upon the true Maxims of Prudence.

With respect to Persons in a more publick Capacity, that Wisdom will properly fall under our Notice, which is call'd *Political*, and consists in a Man's proposing the common Good for his chief End, and his pursuing it by the most proper and effectual Means.

As this kind of Wisdom is terminated upon so noble and excellent an End, and than which nothing greater can enter into the Heart of Man, or be propos'd as the Scope of his Actions, it has ever been esteem'd one of the most illustrious and distinguishing Qualities of human Nature. And nothing in all Ages has given Men a higher or more just Elevation in the Eye of the World. This was the Wisdom for which *Solomon* pray'd, to the End he might be directed by it in the Administration of his Government. *Give therefore thy Servant an understanding*

ing Heart to judge thy People, that I may discern between good and bad, 1 Kings iij. 9. And indeed Wisdom under this Notion of it being of so great Importance and extensive an Influence to Mankind, we ought to look upon it, with this wise Prince, as having something more peculiarly in it of a Divine Original. Accordingly the Author of the Book of *Wisdom*, in the 9th Chapter, which is an admirable Paraphrase on this Prayer of *Solomon*, thus addresses himself to God, *Though a Man be never so perfect among the Children of Men, yet if thy Wisdom be not with him, he shall be nothing regarded, Verse 9.* And it is highly probable, that *Cicero* in the celebrated Passage, where he makes a Divine *Afflatus* necessary towards the forming a great Man in any kind, had the great Statesman or political Genius more particularly in his View.

Yet how often does it happen, that Men of the greatest Capacity, and the most habile in Affairs of State, who perfectly understand the Laws and Interests of their own and foreign Countries, and have very great Advantages both of Power and Credit to facilitate the Execution of their Designs, are not yet able to execute them at all, or not after the Manner they projected; one unexpected Accident or other arising to embarrass them, from the Artifices or Sédulity of their Enemies; from the Temerity, the Distrust, or Infidelity of their Friends; from the Caprice of the People, and sometimes perhaps from the very Temper or Change of the Seasons, which God can so dispose or overrule, that they shall fulfil his Words, and fight *in their Courses* against such Designs, which for

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wise or just Reasons of his Providence, he does not think fit to favour.

But this is not the only Mortification to great Men at the Helm of Affairs, that they are disappointed in their Projects, and frequently in such of them, as were most just and reasonable to be pursued; but even where they succeed in their Measures, the Success does not always terminate in the Honour or other Advantages, which they expected from it. We need not look far into History to find numerous Examples of Men, to whom eminent Services and a distinguish'd Merit have prov'd dangerous, and on some Occasions fatal; but tho' when we consider the corrupt and disorder'd State of the World there is nothing very surprising in such unequal Retributions, it cannot however but afford Matter of some uneasy and grating Reflections to those who have the Misfortune of sharing in them. This Treatment, if any thing can shake a great Mind, must certainly have a strong Tendence to the Confirmation of what *Solomon* here affirms, That *in much Wisdom is much Grief*. For Grief being a Passion ordinarily springing from the Sense of some great Injury or Disappointment, it is but reasonable it should rise the higher, in Porportion to the Evil we suffer, or the Good, which we are frustrated in our Expectations of. But there is no kind of Good or Evil, whereby a Person of true Magnanimity can be affected more, than that which in either kind affects the Publick.

Tho', for the Reasons I have mention'd, Wisdom is often attended in this World with many unhappy accidental Consequences; yet why should Knowledge, which as oppos'd to Wisdom,

dom, is to be consider'd as little more than a bare Act of the Understanding, without regard to our Conduct, or the Interests of Life; why should this noble Talent, I say, so suitable to one of the noblest Powers and Faculties of the Soul, lay the Foundation of Sorrow to Men, and according to the gradual Increase of it, still serve to give them more Trouble and Disquiet?

The Answer to this will appear from what I have to say upon my next Head, under which I propos'd to confirm what *Solomon* here observes,

Secondly, With Respect to *Knowledge*; The Consideration whereof I shall reduce to the Three following Particulars.

1st, The Knowledge of Books.

2^{dly}, Of Men in general. And,

3^{dly}, Of a Man's self.

1st, By the Knowledge of Books, I do not here intend the Knowledge of what concerns the critical Part of them. Tho' that kind of Learning, whatever Pleasure it may afford, is not without Difficulties, which sometimes give the Mind sufficient Pain; but I mean the Knowledge of those Principles, or Sciences, or particular Doctrines, which are taught in Books. There are perhaps some Persons, who by an uncommon Felicity and force of Genius, improv'd by Conversation and Reflection, may be able without the Help of Books to make considerable Progress in any Science, they find an Inclination in themselves of applying to: As there may be others, who have much more just,

clear and distinct Notions both of Religion and Morality, by making a good Use of the natural Strength and Liberty of their Minds, or at most by reading a few Books well chosen, than those who have turn'd over all the Schoolmen, the Commentators, and Systems that are Extant.

I do not speak this to discourage the Reading of Books, but to intimate how cautious we ought to be in selecting such of them, as are most proper to be read, and in Reading them after a manner, that may really tend to the Advancement of useful Learning. For as some Persons order their Studies, it may be question'd, whether their Reading, tho' it may give them the Credit of much Erudition, does not tend more to fill the Mind with dark, confus'd, and incoherent Ideas, than to lay any good Foundation of true and solid Knowledge. This Remark is not only founded in Reasons that are obvious enough, but in Fact; there being few Persons who write in greater Confusion and Obscurity, than learned Men who have read very much, but have not learn'd to think regularly, or with that due Attention which is necessary to excite in the Soul all the Force and Light, whereof it is capable.

But indeed my Business here is not to consider, whether the Method which Men take in reading Books be always so just and methodical as it ought; I am to shew, that however they methodise their Reading, yet the Knowledge they acquire by it, tho' abstractedly consider'd very desirable, yet both in its Infancy, in its Growth, and Consequences, very often
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affords them proper Matter of applying *Solomon's* Complaint in my Text.

1. It is with Difficulty that we learn the Rudiments of Knowledge from Books. For besides, that they do not always set the Subject-Matter of them in a clear Light, or prove what they assert, after a solid and incontestible Manner, or solve all the Difficulties propos'd, or which may occur in Reading them: Besides, I say, that all Books are not free from these Defects, and it may be question'd whether in treating of the Sciences there be any one Book, wholly free from them, it is to be consider'd, that the Mind when it first enters upon Study, finding it self as it were, in a barren Wilderness, where there is little or nothing for it to feed upon, and for which it has as little Relish, soon grows weary in its Researches, and is very unwilling to take Pains for what brings it in no more sensible Returns of Pleasure or Advantage.

Every one may observe with what Difficulty and Reluctance Children apply their *Thoughts* to any thing but what tends to gratify their Senses, or the Appetites of Hunger and Thirst; not having their Understandings open'd, nor knowing the Use of Reason, the ordinary Method of bringing them to the Exercise of it, is by bribing their Senses, or threatening them with Punishments whereof they have some sensible Apprehension.

When young People first apply themselves to the Study of the Sciences, they are but in Comparison still Children, and are therefore very properly term'd *Novices*. The Understanding has but then little Light, and the imperfect

manner wherein it sees Truth, necessarily renders the Desire of it less strong and affecting. For the Mind can only love the Beauties it sees, and which it feels the Power of.

And therefore it frequently happens, that when Men of more slow and dull Capacities observe, there is so great Labour requir'd in the Search after Knowledge, and so small a Reward attending it, they easily persuade themselves, that is better to give over such tasteless and empty Lucubrations, and either to indulge to an idle and indolent way of spending their Time, or to turn their Thoughts upon the Common, and as they apprehend them, more substantial Affairs of Life.

Even Persons of brighter Talents, especially after having spent their first Fire, not experiencing those Rewards that were expected as due to the Toils and Difficulties they have sustain'd, grow by Degrees dispirited, and averse to any further Attempts, and so lose to themselves, and many times to the Publick, the Fruits of a Victory, which a little more Constancy and Resolution would have acquir'd them. Upon the whole it may be said, that Men who want Force or Extent of Mind, in their first Applications to Study, are sooner repuls'd or discourag'd; but those of the most sprightly and penetrating Genius often find Difficulties enough to perplex them, and such as they are not always able to surmount.

We ought notwithstanding to make use of the Light and Strength of our Minds, in what Degree soever dispens'd to us, as much as we can. This is a Duty which Reason and Order require of us, but it is founded also in a particular

cular Designation of Providence since the Fall. To prevent the ill Effects of Idleness, than which there is nothing tends more to feed Corruption, it is the wise Appointment of God, that the Life of the Soul should be maintain'd and supported by the Labour of the Mind, as the animal Life is by that of the Body. Tho' it may be consider'd too as a *penal* Effect of the first Transgression, that instead of that open and clear View, wherewith the Soul of Man in a State of Innocence would have pursued and contemplated Truth; Briars and Thorns are now every where by the just Judgment of God spread in her Way, so that she cannot proceed without much Trouble and Difficulty, but is never able to get perfectly clear of all Difficulties. But,

2. When we have taken the requisite Pains to acquaint our selves with the Principles and Sentiments of a great many Authors, and thereby made some competent Progress in the State of Learning, gain'd more Strength of Mind, and a greater Facility of Attention; yet we shall still find that the Eye of the Understanding is far from being satisfied with seeing, and that it sees Things at the best but very imperfectly. But to confine my Reflections to Books, notwithstanding we must allow them capable of conveying some Light to the Mind, yet most of them, and those in particular which are compos'd upon nice and curious Subjects, commonly leave it very much in the Dark. This may arise sometimes from the Nature of Things, which Authors propose to treat of, and which will not admit of demonstrative Proofs; sometimes from their manner of explaining them,

which is not always just or regular. For in different Writers upon the same Subject we find very different Sentiments advanc'd, and sometimes very specious Probabilities and Appearances of Truth on both sides, without any certain or convincing Proof on either. This necessarily leaves the Mind, especially to those who are not capable of reasoning after a more exact Manner, than the Authors they read, in a State of Anxiety and Suspense, and consequently in a State of *Pain* and Uneasiness.

And now that I have mention'd the Defects of Writers in their way of Argumentation, it is just Matter of Concern to those who know any thing of Books, that it is difficult to find or assign one even among those which teach the Rules of Reasoning, wherein there is nothing erroneous or irrational advanc'd. The Art of thinking, the Methods of cultivating human Understanding, and the Rules which are to direct us in our Search after Truth, are noble Subjects for the Mind of Man to employ it self upon. And yet the best Books that have been written upon these Subjects, do in some Things want to be explain'd or corrected themselves: Nay; there are Errors in them of dangerous Consequence both to Philosophy and Faith; tho' indeed any one Error, if admitted and argued from by a just Deduction of Consequences is sufficient to overthrow all the Truths in the World. And if in those Books, which are design'd to lay down the true Foundations of Reasoning, Men either lay them false, or reason falsely upon them; we are the less to wonder, if in Books, which are not professedly written in a Method so strictly Methodical and Exact, we
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not only find wrong Principles often advanc'd, but wrong Conclusions drawn even from such Principles as are true.

It is a farther sensible occasion of Regret to us in reading of Books, when we see that one of the most excellent Means of communicating Knowledge to the World, is frequently employ'd to little other Purpose than to shew us, that Authors are Men of Parts; that they have an uncommon share of Wit, Invention, or Eloquence; that they are capable of saying what they please upon their Subject, and, upon occasion, of making Error sparkle so much in her counterfeit Jewels, that there shall be no way of distinguishing her from Truth.

I do not here speak of the warm Controversies in Religion or Politicks, wherein most Authors propose little more to themselves than to maintain the Principles they have espous'd, or to argue upon them after such a manner as may tend most effectually to serve the Interests, or recommend them to the Favour of that Communion or Party, they have enter'd into. It is visible, that in many Books of Divinity, and almost in all State Tracts, the Authors taking the several Opinions upon which they are form'd or granted, and as first Principles, conclude they have nothing more to do, but without farther Examination to declaim and expatiate upon them, as well as they can; or at most to prove, what Consequences ought to follow from Principles, and sometimes from Facts which they alledge, yet both which want to be prov'd themselves.

But I here speak concerning Books of Philosophy or human Literature, wherein the Interests,

rests, and for that Reason one would think the Passions of Men are not so strongly concern'd; yet how many human or philosophical Writers, who pretend the most strict and inviolable regard for Truth, seem rather to prefer to her Interests the Honour of a Triumph to themselves. It is a Mistake to think that learned Men, even those who appear most mortify'd to the World, always write out of a generous and pure Love of Truth. They sometimes take up with certain Opinions and Schemes, and then publish them upon very slight Grounds. Vanity, Discontent, a Spirit of Opposition, a desire of being distinguish'd by new Theories or Discoveries, have often a great share in the Motives which induce them to write, and must be very artfully disguis'd not to discover themselves in their Writings to other Men. But,

3. Let the two foregoing Considerations go for nothing; Let us suppose that the Methods of attaining our Knowledge were much more obvious and easy; that there were no good Foundation for the Censure, which has been passed in general upon Books; and that upon all Subjects we have great Numbers of them written with such Clearness and Strength, that they cannot fail of diffusing Light and Conviction into attentive Minds: In a word, that the most celebrated Authors extant, are in their several Faculties perfectly free from Error, and neither inconsistent with one another, nor with themselves. Admitting, I say, as true in all these Respects, what perhaps will scarce be granted in any, it still remains to be consider'd, if after Men have laid in as great a Stock of Knowledge, as could be expected from all these

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Advantages, there are not certain accidental Consequences, which sometimes tend to impair their Satisfaction in it, and fill their Minds with one troublesome and uneasy Reflection or other. For,

In the first Place, Men of Letters are not commonly speaking the least sensible of what the World owes to them. They, more especially, whose Conversation has been chiefly among Books, and who have had fewer Opportunities of knowing the World, or have apply'd themselves less to the Study of human Nature, are apt to think that Learning is the shining and superior Qualification which ought to recommend Men to Favour, and open to them an Access to the Hearts of those, in whose Hands the Interests of this World lie. And yet it is often the Misfortune of such Men either to be wholly neglected, or long postpond in their Expectations; which yet according as they have been more strong, lively, or reasonable, must naturally occasion in them a stronger and more sensible Regret.

It is true, when Knowledge is improv'd to any considerable Degree, and a Man knows how to make a right Use of it, there is nothing more delightful and entertaining to the Mind: But still the Body cannot live upon it. Hunger and Thirst are not to be satisfied with the most curious and refin'd Speculations; neither will the first Marks of Distinction in the Republick of Letters, render a Man of any great Consideration in civil Life, if his exterior Manner and Appearance have any thing singular or despicable in them. When a Person then, who has taken great Pains to climb the Tree of
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Knowledge, and is at length with the Sweat of his Brow got to the Top of it, finds not the Fruit he look'd for upon it, and has little more to solace himself with, than the bare Reflection of his having gain'd a more open Prospect, and his seeing something farther than he did before, this cannot but shake him very much amidst all the pleasing Thoughts of his Elevation, and the secret Disdain perhaps wherewith he looks down upon those who are climbing after him.

But to leave the Metaphor and come to the Thing; under great Disappointments, and which are attended with a long Train of evil and very unhappy Consequences, it is not all the Philosophical Knowledge in the World can sustain the Spirit of a Man with true Constancy and Resolution. Nature on such Occasions will be too weak for a fine Thought, if not supported both by the Principles of our Holy Religion and the Power of God's Grace. It is to them we must at last have Recourse for a Remedy of all our Troubles, and they *can* supply it. They alone can inspire us with a perfect Resignation to the Will of God, and teach us *in whatever State we are, therewith to be content.* — *Both how to be abased, and how to abound,* Phil. iv. 11, 12.

2dly, Knowledge is sometimes an occasion also of exposing Men to Envy. It may under certain Circumstances be very inconvenient for a Man to know, or to have the Reputation of knowing more than his Neighbours: For Knowledge being one of those Talents wherein vain Man is apt to Pride himself, he grows impatient of being rival'd in his Pretensions to it, and
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considers the Character of a Person more knowing than himself as a Diminution at least, if not a design'd Indignity offer'd to his own.

Now, Envy is a Passion, as base and ignoble in its Progress as in its Principle. Malice and Detraction, with every evil Work, that may tend to bring any Disgrace or Injury on the Party envy'd, are the Natural, and I had almost said, the necessary Growth of it. It may be question'd, whether any of the Passions occasion more Enmity and Division among Men, or put them upon biting and devouring one another after a more violent and inhuman Manner: So that if learned Men had nothing more to propose, than a little Credit or Applause, as the Reward of their Lucubrations, instead of making farther Improvements in the Search after Knowledge, it would many times be both for their Advantage and Ease, to be unknown themselves.

3dly, There is also Danger, that the Knowledge which Men have for many Years been acquiring with much Labour and Difficulty, may by Degrees be impair'd, or perhaps altogether lost. A Fit of Sicknefs is sometimes sufficient to obliterate, at least to confound all the Notions which a Man has for a long time been treasuring up in his Mind. But the Decays of Age are inevitable, and have a sensible Effect on the Minds of all Men: And what gives the greater Force to this Reflection is, that a considerable part of our Age is gone, before our Knowledge is of any great Use or Extent, and seldom indeed comes to any Perfection, till it advances very near the Point of its *Decline*.

These are some of the ordinary Consequences of much Knowledge; and tho' I have principally
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mention'd them, in regard to that Knowledge which is deriv'd from Books, and with an Eye to what *Solomon* observes, *Chap. xij. 12. Of making many Books, there is no end, and much Study is a weariness to the Flesh*; yet these general Reflections may be indifferently apply'd to the remaining Particulars, I propos'd to consider, but which must be reserv'd for the Subject of my next Discourse.

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SERMON XI.

The same Subject continu'd.

ECCL.ES. i. 18.

In much Wisdom is much Grief, and he that increaseth Knowledge increaseth Sorrow.

I Am now to shew, that these Words of Solomon are also applicable,

Secondly, With respect to the Knowledge of Mankind in general. No Body questions the Usefulness, or rather indeed the Necessity of this kind of Knowledge to those, who would conduct themselves in the World by the Rules of Prudence, or manage the Affairs of Life to any Advantage: Without a competent Measure of it, Men are equally unqualify'd for Conversation and Business, and much less capable of doing Service either to their Friends, or themselves. And therefore we may observe, that Persons of the first Distinction and brightest

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est Character in civil Life, are usually such as have had great Opportunities of knowing Mankind, and made a good Improvement of it. This Knowledge in Truth is of so great Use to those, who are Masters of it, that it supplies in great Measure, or however covers the Defects of their Education in other Regards. And there are Men, who upon the bare Advantage of it, not only acquit themselves in the most eminent Stations, with Honour and Applause, but have the Art of engaging other Persons in their own, or the Interest of their Friends with a wonderful Facility, and after a manner, which all the Philosophy in the World would never have dictated to more learned Men. This will be granted at least, that the Knowledge of Mankind is more requisite towards rendering Men of any Consideration in Society, of any Use to themselves or others, than the Knowledge of all the Sciences without it.

The want of it indeed serves many times only to betray learned Men into greater Indiscretions, and to give them, what never pleases, an Air of Singularity or Affectation. We may say then, that the Knowledge of Mankind is that which refines and gives a better Lustre to all other Parts of Knowledge; which tho' in Conjunction with it, they are generally necessary towards forming a great or useful Man, yet separately in all the Affairs of human Life it is of more Use and Credit to a Man to know human Nature, than to be very knowing or learned in other Respects.

But supposing the Advantages of this Knowledge as great as they have been represented; is there nothing which brings Trouble with it, or
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that may occasion any Pain or Uneasiness of Mind? To those who do not consider the Dignity of human Nature, or have no Regard to the Honour of it, perhaps there may not. But to Persons of any Consideration or Ingenuity it cannot but occasion a sensible Regret, when they observe how generally that noble and reasonable Creature Man, either acts quite out of his Character, or sinks very much below it.

But to lay open all the Wounds of human Nature would be too long and offensive an Operation; I shall therefore, in considering the general State of it, limit my self to the two Heads of *Insincerity* and *Impiety*.

1st, To know Mankind, primarily signifies indeed, and by general Consent, to know the several Arts Men use under several Disguises, in order to effect their Designs, and how we may best prevent our being impos'd upon by them. For Truth, Justice and Honour, how corrupt soever the World may grow, will ever be valu'd and esteem'd in it. But because it frequently happens, that neither the Ends which Men propose to themselves, nor the Means they use to accomplish them, are to be examin'd too strictly upon these Heads, therefore to preserve some degree of Esteem, which is necessary to facilitate the Execution even of their worst Designs, they would appear at least to act upon virtuous Principles, and as far as possible avoid the Suspicion of acting upon any other.

This Constraint which wicked Men put themselves under, in order to conceal their true Intentions, does *indirectly* do some Honour, even to Virtue, and shews, that notwithstanding she has not all the Power over them, she ought to

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have, yet out of Regard to the common Sense and Judgment of Mankind, they cannot but entertain a secret Esteem and Veneration for her ; So that were she not really of her self so very *lovely* and desirable, it must however be acknowledged one Means of supporting her Honour and Interests in the World, that she is so universally allow'd to be Praise-worthy, and of *good Report*.

But where, after all, is the Spirit of a Man, or any thing becoming the Dignity of his Nature, in a continu'd Course of Dissimulation and Double-dealing ; in putting out at every Turn false Colours, by Favour of which he may better escape unobserv'd ; or in putting on a Disguise, out of which he is perpetually afraid or ashamed to be seen ? I do not here universally arraign Mankind, and heartily wish, that what I say may not extend to the greater Part of them. When we speak of Christians especially, we might, one would think, hope better Things of them, and Things more suitable to the *Simplicity and godly Sincerity*, which are the proper Graces of their Christian Profession. But let us consider a little more particularly, if even great Numbers of them may not in one Degree or other be affected with the Charge I am exhibiting.

The End of Speech is to keep up among Men a Communication of their Thoughts ; by this Means, Beings that are altogether invisible to one another are capable of conversing familiarly together, and maintaining an Intercourse, the most admirable both in its Kind, and the many noble Uses that arise from it : But when these Uses are frustrated by our speaking contrary to the
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the real Sense of our Minds, or by dissembling them in such a Manner, that they are at the best but very imperfectly known, and without any certain Consequences to be drawn from them, then this Method so wisely design'd by God to lay the Foundation of mutual Trust and Confidence among Men, serves only to introduce an insidious way of Commerce, equally injurious and dishonourable to them.

And yet how often does it happen, that if we would know the real Sentiments of Men, we must look for some other Signs, whereby they may be interpreted than their Words ; and there are certain other Signs, which it is not necessary to name, that if we narrowly observe them, are much less apt to deceive us. I may add, that the Wit and Dexterity of cunning Men are seen in nothing more than in their expressing themselves after so equivocal, but specious and handsome a manner, that they shall appear to say a great many just and fine Things, without meaning or designing any thing.

I would not willingly make Observations that may bring Discredit on human Nature, but rather desire to entertain such Ideas as are most advantageous and honorary to it. Yet it may perhaps, without Injustice, be observ'd, that one of the greatest Arts of Life, and the most generally cultivated by Men, is to preserve the Appearances of Justice and Ingenuity in Conversation, whether the Motives upon which they do it, be really Good and Ingenuous, or not.

Of how little Importance for Instance, in common Construction, are Professions of Kindness and Respect ? How ordinary is it for Men to declare themselves ready to do any Service

in their Power to those, whom they have no manner of Inclination to favour; nay, whose Interests perhaps they are at the very time secretly opposing? Upon how slight an Occasion are many People absolutely at the Command of those they never saw before, and may probably never see again, even tho' they have receiv'd no particular Obligations from them, nor have any to expect?

It will be said, that these ceremonious Professions of Benevolence and Esteem, have the less Danger of leading Persons, to whom they are made, into any great Mistakes, as it seems generally agreed, that they should stand for no more than mere customary Forms of Salutation. But admitting, that this might in some Measure excuse Men in complying with such Forms, from the Charge of Insincerity; yet it cannot but grieve any one, who has the least Concern for the Honour of his own Species, to think the original Design and Use of Speech should be so far perverted, that Men should affect to speak the Language not of Men, but of Birds; and that certain Words continually repeated in all manner of Conversation, and which are most plain in their Signification, should yet be intended by common Consent to signify nothing.

Every Man is chargeable also with Insincerity, who being in any publick Employment, does not acquit himself with Fidelity, and according to all the other Conditions, whether imply'd or express'd, upon which he receiv'd it; or who in his private Calling and Profession takes Advantage of the Ignorance or Necessities of other People, by putting into their Hands false
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Wares, or setting too high and immoderate a Rate upon them.

It will be impossible to enumerate the several fundamental Practises of Men in their way of Commerce with the World. Let us but examine their Sincerity a little, in Relation to one of the greatest Blessings of civil Life, that of Friendship: And which if any thing will be allow'd to suppose a mutual Exchange of all good and generous Offices, without the least Suspicion of any false or indirect Arts in any kind. This Supposition is agreeable to the Sentiments which Mankind have ever had concerning Friendship; and upon the Account of which all moral Writers have spoken so many excellent Things of it. Nay there are few of superior Rank among them, who have not particularly endeavour'd to distinguish themselves, and shine upon this Head; yet all their fine Sayings put together, are of no Consideration towards giving a just and lively Idea of Friendship, in comparison of that one Declaration, which our Lord made to his Disciples. *John xv. 15. Henceforth I call you not Servants— But I have called you Friends.* And the Blessed Effects of this Relation, as he afterwards explains himself, consisted in the free Discovery he had made to them of all Things it concern'd them to know, and the ready Compliance they might expect from him, in whatever they should ask.

In every Condition of Life the Blessings of Friendship are very great and desirable; yet it is too visible, that the Name of it is much more common than the Thing. For what indeed is the Friendship of a great many Men but Matter of Traffick, which as soon as the com-

mutative and beneficial Part of it is over, puts an End to their Correspondence, and a mutual Exchange of their good Offices wholly ceases, with that of their Interests. And now, if we cast a short Review upon what has been said, Have we not just Cause to take up a *Lamentation*? And to conclude, that the Knowledge of Mankind, how Useful or Necessary soever, on many Accounts; yet, upon the whole Matter, is not so Satisfactory as might be expected from the great Advantages of it. For indeed, what true Satisfaction can there be in the highest Improvements of a Knowledge; one principal Design whereof is, to fill the Mind with continual Suspicion and Distrust; to Teach us, That there is not so much Integrity to be found in the World, as Persons who do not know it, are apt to imagin; That we are therefore to be Cautious, how we understand the ordinary Language of Men, according to the most proper and natural Construction of it; or how we Treat with them, whatever we may hope from a Principle of Candour or Charity, after any other manner, than if we suppos'd they may possibly at least be wanting in both themselves. But the great Misfortune is, That these Rules are not only to be observ'd, in respect to Persons we converse indifferently with, but in some Measure to those who profess themselves our Friends. This however, will be granted, That in the Friendships which appear to be the best founded and confirm'd, we never apprehend ourselves in greater danger of losing our Friends, than when we have the greatest Occasion to make Use of them.

If

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If the Insincerity of Men, to those who know the Word, give Occasion for so many uneasy Reflections, what shall we think,

2dly, Of their Impiety.

I would not, under this Head, represent the Corruption of Mankind, with Circumstances of Aggravation; which there is no occasion for. Yet, it may not be improper to make some general Observations upon the visible Decay of Piety in the World. And,

1. In the first Place, there are Men very Corrupt, even in their Principles; who yet, in some respects, affect to be thought more Corrupt than really they are. Such are they, who pretend to believe there is no God; no natural or immutable Distinction of Good and Evil; no future Account to be given of their Actions; nor any such Thing as Divine Revelation. For we are not to suppose, that Men, who attack Religion in these several Articles, or in any of them, do it from a full and settled Conviction of their being in the Right. No: There are so many Reasons of Vanity, Interest, or Resentment, to mention no more, which may induce Men to Speak or Write against such Truths as are generally, in their way of expressing it, *vulgarly* receiv'd: That it is not unreasonable to think, they oftner engage in the Cause of *Atheism* and *Infidelity*, from one or more of these Motives, than from any regard to the Truth of what they advance.

But whatever the secret Designs of such Men may be, it cannot be hop'd, that they should

contribute much to the Advancement of true Piety. Their Discourses and Writings have, on the other Hand, very ill Effects upon ignorant and injudicious Persons; whom indeed, they can only be intended to pervert. And in proportion, as the Belief of Men, in reference to the fundamental Articles I have mention'd, become less Strong or Confirm'd, they will naturally grow more Loose and Irregular in their Practise. I do not deny, that Impiety often proceeds from those sinful Inclinations or Habits, whereby we are excited to resist the Light of our Minds: But still, what we believe has, generally speaking, some Influence on our Conduct; and we seldom observe a very great and extraordinary Corruption in the Morals of Men, till they have been first vitiated in their Principles.

As to those who disown the Principles of *Atheism*, and only set themselves to disprove the Truths of Divine Revelation; I know 'tis pretended by them, that all the Reasons of Vertue and Piety, are sufficiently provided for, upon the mere Grounds of natural Religion: But it would be more to their Advantage if they could shew us, that there is, or ever was, in Fact, a Foundation for such a Pretence; or whether their own Morals in particular, are of any Use to support it. If notwithstanding all the Advantages of reveal'd Religion, and so many powerful, and, one would think, irresistible Motives superinduc'd in it, to persuade Men to Holiness, there is still so much Corruption among Christians; it cannot be expected but that Piety would decline yet more and more, in proportion, as these adventitious Arguments to it should

should be impair'd, or lose the influence they ought to have, on the Minds of Men. But should God, in his just Judgment, withdraw the Light of the Gospel from any part of the Christian World, no Deist, I presume, whatever Immoralities Christians may be charg'd with, would be capable of supposing, that Morality would receive any great Improvement in a State of Heathenism, or if he pleases to employ a softer Expression, of natural Religion. No Proof certainly, can be drawn in favour of such a Supposition, from the State of any one of those Countries where the Christian Religion was first Planted, but which is now become the Seat of Infidelity.

2. There are others who, if they do not openly deny the main Articles of the Christian Faith, and industriously contribute, by their Discourse or Writings, to the Growth of Infidelity, the principal Cause, as we have seen of corrupting the Morals of Men; yet they do not always oppose the Methods which are us'd to propagate it, with the Zeal or Integrity that becomes them. Nay, in some Points which do not strike directly at the Foundation of reveal'd Religion, tho' of great Importance in themselves, and contrary to the Form of sound Doctrine once deliver'd to the Saints, they seem, if not wholly to give into certain Prejudices, yet to favour those who do, in such a manner, as if they had really a warm Side towards them.

I do not speak this to discourage Men from shewing all the Tendernefs, Compassion, and Forbearance, which the Gospel requires towards those who are in Error, for these indeed are the
proper

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proper Means of bringing them into the way of Truth, and cannot be too earnestly recommended by Christians, who know what manner of Spirit they are of; yet even these Duties are to be practic'd with Moderation, and in a due Extent. And under a Pretence that the Times will not bear sound Doctrine, or regular Discipline, Men are to be very Cautious how they indulge to such Principles or Measures, as may have any visible Tendency in the Event, towards exploding both Discipline and Doctrine out of the World.

3. We observe Men at other Times, very Orthodox in their Principles, full of Zeal for promoting them, and making a vigorous Stand against those, *who oppose Themselves*: In whose Conduct notwithstanding, the Power of Godliness is not so visible as it ought to be. And tho' I see no Reason, why bad Men may not, on proper Occasions, be allow'd to be zealously affected in a *good Matter*; yet certainly their Zeal would shine much the brighter, and have a powerful Influence towards disabusing such as have Err'd, or are Deceiv'd; if it were in all respects regulated according to Knowledge, and they would always resolve, while they have the Light, to walk as *Children of Light*.

The most ignorant People are capable of forming these, or the like Arguments. If Men in good earnest believe the great Truths of Religion, and have, as they pretend, the Interests of it really at Heart; it is very reasonable to conclude, they would be more careful to discover the Power of it in their Lives and Conversations. For Interest is never suppos'd to
Lye

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Lye of Dissemble. And yet we observe, there are great Numbers of People, whose Manners are, in several respects, very opposite to the Principles which they openly Espouse, and in Defence whereof, they would, perhaps, upon Occasion, be ready to suffer many Things.

This is no contemptible Objection in Prejudice of Religion; I shall therefore endeavour to give a particular Answer to it, in few Words as possible. And,

1. It must be granted, that we are never less deceiv'd in the Judgment we make, concerning the real Sentiments of Men, than when it is founded upon what relates to their Interest. And it is certainly the Interest of every Man, who has any true regard for Religion, and desires it should flourish in the World, to govern himself by the Maxims of it. But yet we are to distinguish between the Interests of Men, in reference to their general, and to their particular or occasional Inclinations. It is the Concern of every Man, in his civil Capacity, that all Persons, in their several Stations, should be faithful to the Trust repos'd in them. The Love indeed which Men naturally have for Order, requires this; and therefore makes People, to whose Fortunes it is of no great Consequence, whether the publick Affairs be regularly or justly administred, yet very desirous that they should be so; and as warm in their Invectives against all Male-Administration, or Suspicion of it, as if they had as much to lose as Persons of the first Rank or Distinction. And yet how much soever Men are inclin'd to condemn or abhor Fraud and Injustice, abstractedly consider'd,

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der'd, and where they are under no particular Temptation to any indirect Arts themselves; yet, where they have a fair Opportunity, if we may call it so, of practising them, and their private Advantage by such a Practice, will more than ballance the Loss they sustain in that of the Publick; it may be question'd, Whether their Inclination in general, for preserving Order and Justice, is not sometimes in danger, in particular Cases of being over-rul'd?

Thus it is with respect to Men, consider'd in their religious Capacity. It is for the common Good and Happiness of Mankind, that the Interests of Religion should be carefully provided for and secur'd. And when we speak of the Christian Religion in particular, no Rule of Life could have been contriv'd more conducing to the Welfare of Mankind, in every respect, or in all the relations they bear to one another. Yet, as much as it is the Concernment of every Christian, to take care, in his proper Sphere, of the Interests of Christianity, and to do what he can to promote them; it is visible that this Duty so confessedly incumbent on us in general, does too often give way to the corrupt Motions of Self-love, or the Power of some particular Temptation. Thus again, if we descend to consider the State of Religion in the best constituted Church in the World; there are great Numbers of Men in Communion with it, that, in their Judgment, really approve and think themselves oblig'd to contribute what they can to preserve the Constitution of it; who nevertheless, are not always so conformable in Practice as they should be, either to Her Doctrine or Worship. This gives great occasion of Scandal

dal and Offence, and sometimes Prejudices weak People to such a degree, that they become an easier Prey to those who lie in wait to Deceive, and are tempted to Separate from her.

But this ought to be no more objected, in Prejudice of such a Church, than the ill Lives and Manners of Christians in Prejudice of the Christian Religion in general. Tho' indeed we should take the best Method of securing the Honour and Interest of Religion, in both regards, if on one Hand we would be careful to have our Conversation as becometh the Gospel of Christ; and on the other, resolve to be as Zealous in observing the Rules, as in standing up for the Rights of that particular Church, we live in Communion with.

2. It may be further consider'd, That our Saviour himself foretold, That all those who might make Profession of his holy Religion, would not live in Obedience to his Laws; nay, *that Iniquity would even abound* among many of them. And what he foretold, is no more indeed, than what might have been very reasonably suppos'd, from the State and Condition of human Nature. For how strong soever, as they must be allow'd to have very great Force in them, the Motives to Piety and Holiness are, which the Scriptures afford, and which, above all, the Grace of God may inspire; yet they do not destroy the natural Use and Freedom of our Faculties: And therefore, among so great a number as were to make Profession of the Christian Religion, it was very likely there would be some, who might make an ill Use of their Liberty, grieve the Holy Spirit, and render all the Motions of his Grace,

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Grace, with all the moral Considerations the Gospel supplies towards promoting Holiness, ineffectual to their Conversion.

It is however, a thing to be very much lamented by all those who have any Sense of Piety, that there are so many Christians who do not walk worthy of the Vocation whereunto they are called, but by their wicked and unchristian Lives, give occasion for the Name of Truth to be evil spoken of; and that in general, the State of the Christian World is very Corrupt, tho' perhaps Christianity was never, in any Age of it since the Apostolical, better explain'd or understood.

But this is a Subject apt to fill the Minds of all pious and well-dispos'd Persons with so sensible a Grief, that I shall not dwell any longer upon it, or proceed to shew, that those who are most vers'd in the Knowledge of Mankind, have frequent occasions of observing, that a great part of them are not only, in many respects, visibly Corrupt, but that even the Good they do, has a great mixture of Impurity in it, and is done upon very different Motives from those, by which they would appear to be influenc'd.

2. The last particular I propos'd to consider is, *The Knowledge of a Man's Self*. And here one would think, the Mind might experience that Satisfaction which was not to be found in its former Disquisitions. For to know a Man's Self, is to know the Dignity and Excellency of his own Nature; and the Order and Rank he sustains in the Creation, which is a little lower than that of Angels; but in one respect may be said superior to it. The Son of God having assum'd our
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human Nature into a personal Union with the Divine: And being now set down at the right Hand of the Majesty on High, where all Power being committed to him, and all Homage and Worship, both in Heaven and Earth, paid him: He has, I say, in this respect, advanced the human Nature, and given it a Preheminence, above that of the Angelical, or any other created Being whatever.

There is also this peculiar in the Nature of Man, and which opens to us a new Scene of Wonder; That he is compos'd of two Substances wholly different in their Essence and Properties. By his Soul, he is united to the Spiritual and invisible World, and is capable of having his Conversation in it. By his Body, he has relation to sensible and corporeal Objects, and maintains a continual Entercourse with them; for he alternately impells and is impell'd, affects and is affected by them: But which is still more surprizing, tho' there can possibly be no Contact between these two different Substances; yet, by the wonderful Laws of their Communication which God has establish'd, and which infinite Power and Wisdom alone could establish, they act reciprocally upon one another, as if they were really Substances of the same kind. The Soul feels the Impressions that are made upon the Body; the Body follows the Motions, and obeys the Orders of the Soul with an obsequiousness, quick to appearance as Thought it self: For the Soul no sooner Wills the Motion of the Hand, but the Hand moves; and the Hand is no sooner wounded, but the Disorder which the Wound occasions, gives Pain to the Soul.

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It is so impossible indeed to account for these Laws of Communication, upon any natural or explicit Grounds, that some, and not without specious Appearances of Reason, have deny'd, That there is any such thing as Matter, according to the common Idea Men have of it, in the World. And indeed, there would be some more probable Foundation for what they advance, were we to set aside the Arguments from *Sense*, which yet are not the most certain or conclusive.

For that our Senses are not given us to judge of the Nature or internal Constitution of Things, is, I think, very evident from hence, That there is no relying on their Testimony, but in what relates to the Preservation or Support of the sensible Life: For this purpose they are admirably form'd, discharge their respective Offices for the most part very faithfully, and indeed seldom impose upon us. We judge well enough by the Eye, of the Danger in coming too near a Precipice, or the Point of a Sword. Nay, the Sight generally makes a pretty good Report of what it may be fit for us to Eat or Drink; or if it should herein happen to deceive us, the Taste, where 'tis not vitiated by some extraordinary Accident, is always prepar'd to give us timely and better Information.

I might observe concerning the other Senses, that their principal End and Employment is, to take care of the Body, and gratify the sensible Appetites; for which reason it would be very much to our Advantage, if on some occasions we wanted, or would suspend the Use of them: But with respect to Things that do not concern them, or have no direct tendency, to
make

make Provision for the *Animal Life*, the Senses are generally false, are at best very suspicious Witnesses ; and we ought to be very cautious how we trust too much to them : For Instance ; it being of no Consequence to the Good of the Body, or any ways Necessary to the Nutriment or regular State of it, that the Eye should judge exactly at what distance the Sun, Moon and Stars are from the Earth, there never was any Person who, by his Sight, was capable of making an exact Calculation of that Distance. I do not speak this to Vilify the Senses which serve to so many admirable, but sometimes dangerous Purposes : I would only observe, that they are very incompetent Judges of the Essences of Things, or the *Substatum* in particular, whatever that be, of what we call Matter ; and ought not to be appeal'd to, in a Case above their Capacity, and out of their Province. All the Ends, for which they were appointed, being sufficiently answer'd, without their taking upon them to decide so arduous a Point, and the Health and Safety of the Body, their *proper* Charge, no ways depending upon the decision of it. This, in my humble Opinion, must be granted, at least, That the Proofs of a material Being, from the Report of the Senses, are far from being so strong or cogent, as those of an Immaterial, from Thought, Liberty, and Reflection.

But to return from this Digression, besides the noble Powers and Faculties of the Mind of Man, his Body is, in all its Parts, and all the proper Uses of them, of so admirable a Structure, that we need seek no further for an evident and convincing Proof of a Deity. Such effects as we

here observe, could not proceed but from an infinitely wise and powerful Cause. This *Galen*, who was not more credulous in Matters of Religion, than other learned Men of his Profession, was oblig'd, in a Treatise compos'd on that Subject, to acknowledge. And holy *David* acknowledges it to God, in a Strain of Admiration; which discovers he was, at the same time, struck with a very awful Sense of his Wisdom and Power: *I will praise thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: Marvellous are thy Works*, Ps. cxxxix. 14.

Upon all these Advantages of Body and Mind, and what is peculiar to him above all other created Beings, the wonderful Union of them, whereby they mutually impart their Motions and Desires, and generally speaking their Pains and Pleasures, it might be expected that a Man should take great complacency in Considering and *Knowing* himself, especially where there is something in this Knowledge that tends to gratify his Vanity; a Passion which cannot be subdu'd, but with great Pains and Difficulty, if, after all, he may ever be able to obtain an entire Conquest of it.

But does this same Man, Vain as he is, really live up to the Order and Perfection of his Nature, and act suitably to those Effects of the Divine Favour, whereby he is, in so many respects, distinguish'd? Let him examine himself a little upon this Head, and we shall soon, I'm afraid, as to the Question before us, be oblig'd to change our Opinion of him.

For does not his own Conscience tell him, (and what is more painful and grievous than an evil Conscience) that he has been very far from sustain-

sustaining his Character, in any respect, as he ought; that he is continually debasing that Nature, by his Sins and Impieties, which God has exalted to so high Dignity and Glory, in the Person of his Son: And that as to all the great and superior Talents committed to him, he is able to render but a very sorry Account of the Uses they have been put to, or the Improvement he has made of them.

How often, instead of enriching his Mind with a Stock of good or religious Notions, has he employ'd it, if perhaps he has not wholly given himself up to an idle and indolent way of spending his Time, upon Things of no Use or Importance to be known, or which he might, with a better Conscience, have been ignorant of? Or if by due application he has acquir'd greater Strength of Mind and Extent of Knowledge, how often have the Effects of them not been observable in the regulation of his Will and Affections?

With how many impure Ideas is his Imagination defil'd? And how strange, ludicrous and chimerical Conceits, tho' we should not suppose them directly Sinful, is it continually forming, even when he guards with the greatest Caution, against the restless Insinuations and Malignity of it?

How often does his Passions, especially that of his predominant Temper, prove too strong for his Reason; and sometimes for his most warm and vigorous Resolutions, tho' they have been very often and solemnly repeated?

And as to his Body, which in the natural Order of Things is subservient to the Soul, and ought to yield a ready Compliance with all the

reasonable Motions of it; how often does it prove Insolent and Mutinous, or remonstrate against the hard Usage put upon it, after a manner too Insuaring, or too Powerful to be oppos'd? Particularly with respect to the Duty of presenting *his Body a living Sacrifice, holy acceptable to God*, in the more solemn Worship of him, whether publick or private; what Indisposition to the proper Acts of Piety and Devotion, has it not frequently caus'd? Or where it has not been wholly able to hinder him from serving God, on how many Occasions may he remember, but not be mention'd, in comparison of those he has forgotten, that it has taken off his Attention from Divine Service, or suggested to him, in the Words of the Prophet *Malachi, What a weariness is it?* ch. i. 13.

These are Questions, to say nothing of what, as Christians, we are chargeable with, for our abuse of Divine Grace, or Impenitence under all the Means of it: These are Questions, I say, which every one who knows himself, knows with what Propriety and Justice they have been offer'd: But the best Use we can make of them, since they cannot but be attended with grievous and sorrowful Reflections, is to improve them towards begetting in us that *goodly Sorrow*, which worketh a Repentance not to be repented of.

But were it not then better for Men, upon the whole Matter, to give over their Pursuits both of Wisdom and Knowledge? Or may it not follow as a very proper Direction, from what has been observ'd, He that is foolish or ignorant, let him be foolish and ignorant still? For what can discourage Men more in their Endeavours,
in

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in any kind, than that if they succeed in them, they shall have nothing but Grief and Sorrow for their Pains? In a Word, is it not more eligible to know Little or Nothing, and to act without Design, than to have a very comprehensive Knowledge, and be very wise in Designing to no End, but the procuring our own Disquiet, and perhaps our Ruin, or Disgrace?

In answer to this, I shall conclude with observing, what I take to have been the real Design of *Solomon*, in the Words of my Text.

I. The principal Argument of this Book is to shew, That there is no perfect Happiness attainable here: To prove which, the Preacher descends to consider those several Advantages that are suppos'd to contribute most towards making Men happy; and some of which they pursue indeed with so much Zeal and Assiduity, as if they were really capable of supplying all their Wants, or gratifying all their Desires: But the Pretensions of Wisdom and Knowledge to this End, are very Considerable; both as they add to the Perfection of the Mind, and are of great Use, in order to our attaining many other Enjoyments of Life, and of improving them, when attain'd, to the greatest Advantage: And yet they are so far from making us Happy, that he observes Grief and Sorrow are the ordinary Attendants of them. But shall we not therefore Endeavour after them? This cannot be inferr'd: It should rather follow, that tho' they may be attended with some present Inconveniencies, yet, as they are highly Subservient,

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and in some degree Necessary towards promoting our true and supreme Happiness, we ought notwithstanding, to labour in our Pursuits after them. And this is what *Solomon* himself, in many Places, advises; and particularly in the second Chapter of *Proverbs*, he adds such a Reason to enforce his Advice on this Head, as is sufficient to compensate for all the Pains we can take or suffer, in following it. *My Son* —

If thou incline thine Ear unto Wisdom, and apply thine Heart to Understanding; yea, if thou criest after Knowledge, and liftest up thy Voice for Understanding. If thou seekest her as Silver, and searchest for her as for hidden Treasure; then shalt thou understand the Fear of the Lord, and find the Knowledge of God.

2. It may be further consider'd, That such proverbial Sayings as this of my Text, are not to be taken in too rigid and strict a Sense. The degrees of Pain or Trouble, which Wisdom or Knowledge occasion, are very different in different Men: And the Advantages of them in all Men, if rightly improv'd, are more than sufficient to balance the Inconveniences they may sometimes expose them to. It is granted, that the wisest Men often fail of the End they propose, tho' they employ the most probable Means to effect it; and that the most knowing Men, do not always make a Merit by their Knowledge. What should be the Consequence of this, but to make them apply their Thoughts more to such Things, as may make them Wise unto Salvation; and prepare them for that happy, that perfectly happy State,

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State, where they shall know every thing worthy to be known, not by the present laborious and fallible Methods of Ratiocination, but by immediate Intuition; where they shall Hunger no more, nor Thirst no more after Knowledge? And to conclude in the Prophetical Style; where there shall be neither *Sorrow*, neither shall there be any more *Pain*, for the former Things are done away.

R 4

To

To the Reverend
Dr. SHERLOCK,
Vice-Chancellor of *Cambridge,*
A N D
Master of the *Temple.*

Reverend Sir,

I Have been induc'd to address this Discourse to You, from the Subject-Matter of it; from a Desire of shewing my self Grateful, and from the greatest personal Esteem I am capable of entertaining.

The Subject upon which I here presume to offer You my Thoughts, whether the Design of it in general be consider'd, or the particular Occasion of applying it, is very noble and important. But for that Reason it may be thought the more assuming in me, to publish a Discourse, wherein there are so many Defects; and at the same time to lay it before a
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Person whose Discourses from the Pulpit have all of them, all the Beauty and Strength, that correct easy Language, and strict Reasoning can give them.

There are, I hope, few Persons capable of entertaining a Suspicion, as if the expressing a due Regard to the Memory of the late QUEEN, had any secret Design in it injurious to the Honour of Her Successor. Could there be any Foundation for such a Surmise, it would very ill become one, who owes his Dependance to the Favour of the Government, to render himself obnoxious on that Account.

Prejudices of this kind, if it be not Criminal even to suppose them, are, I conceive, of no real Service to the Publick. But I do not know, whether the Grounds of them are any where better, or more effectually remov'd, than in an Excellent Sermon before the House of Commons, on the last Anniversary of Queen ANNE's Accession: In which all the Fidelity and Honour owing to Her Majesty were indeed recommended after the most eloquent Manner, but withal the most just and honorary to the Succession.

Sir,

A further Design of this Address is to acknowledge the many Favours I have had the Honour to receive from You, which tho' of themselves very considerable, had something so particularly engaging in the manner of them,
as

as will ever leave the strongest Impressions of Gratitude upon me.

I reckon among Your Favours the Advice, which I have so frequently had occasion to request, and sometimes in Cases of greater Difficulty, that gave me an Opportunity of observing with more Attention, a Readiness, a Force, and Extent of Thought, which are not often to be found separately, in equal Perfection.

Sir,

It is no wonder if the Esteem, which I had invincibly entertain'd upon the first Occasion of my being known to You, and previously to so many Obligations, should be still heighten'd by the Reflection of what I owe, and I ought to add, what my Family owes, upon a distinct Consideration, to them.

To say what I am inclin'd, and with great Justice should be allow'd to say concerning Your many excellent Qualities, would be offensive to that in particular, which by shading them, gives a better Grace and Comeliness to all the rest. You are plac'd in a Light, which discovers You to the greatest Advantage, and wherein none but Persons of the brightest Character, and the greatest Talents ought to be plac'd. To say nothing of the Eminent and Honourable Post which You so deservedly fill, in one of the most celebrated Seats of Learning; I do not know any Character in the Church, or out of it, that seems to require a finer or stronger

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ger Capacity, than that of Master of the Temple.

How well you have supported that Character, is acknowledg'd by one of the most judicious and awful Auditories in the World; and which is compos'd of a great Number of Persons, not only Learn'd in their proper Profession, but in all the more elegant and polite Parts of Learning. I shall only add, that in this Station, You have succeeded with Applause one of the best Preachers, and were it not that Comparisons are invidious, I might be allow'd to say, the Happiest and most moving practical Writer, that the Age he liv'd in, produc'd. One known and admirable Instance of what I observe, is his Book upon Death; and it may be affirm'd, without (a) the Testimony of an Apparition from the Dead, to be the most perfect that was ever seen, or perhaps ever will be seen in its kind.

(a) Relation of an Apparition before Drelincourt's Book of Death

I am,

Sir,

Your most Obedient,

most Humble, and

Oblig'd Servant,

RIC. FIDDES.

SERMON XII.

Preach'd on the Death of
Her late M A J E S T Y
Queen A N N E.

ISAIAH lvij. 3.

*The Righteous perisheth, and no Man layeth it
to Heart.*

THE Words are not to be taken in too strict and restrain'd a Sense ; but according to a Latitude, necessary towards explaining the Prophetical Writings, which abound with bold Figures, and frequently in the hyperbolical Strain. Thus in particular our Saviour complains, by the Prophet (Chap. l. 2.) that when he should come and preach the Gospel to the Jews, none of them would receive him, or his Doctrine. *Wherefore, when I came, was there no Man. When I call'd, was there none to answer.* That is none in Comparison of what might have been expected. *But to as many as receiv'd him,*

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him, faith the Evangelist, to them gave he Power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name, John i. 12.

What we are therefore to understand by the Words of the Text, and all I would be thought to intend by them, is, that either Men *in general* do not consider as they ought the Reasons of Providence, in the Death of righteous Persons; or if they do, are not however careful to improve this Consideration to the proper Ends and Uses of it. The Expression in the Text, of *laying to Heart* will justify my insisting on both these Senses; I shall therefore directly proceed to shew, that the Death of righteous Persons, or of *any* Person eminently Righteous, affords us very proper and useful Matter,

First, Of pious Reflections on the Providence of God. And,

Secondly, Of Humiliation for our Sins.

Ist, Of pious Reflections on the Providence of God.

The Operations of that great and glorious Majesty, whose *Work is perfect, and all whose Ways are Judgment*, must at once be the most Noble, and the most necessary Subject, about which our Thoughts can be employ'd: It is impossible for us indeed to contemplate them with Attention, and, for any time, but we shall find the Heart mov'd and penetrated, and our Practise in some Measure at least influenced thereby. All the Actions of God bear the Character of his Attributes: He can do nothing

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thing that is *inconsiderable*. But there is something in the Death of righteous Persons, that deserves our special Consideration, upon these Two Accounts.

1. As such Persons are the more peculiar Charge of Providence.

2. As there is something peculiarly design'd by Providence, in their Death, to convince us of the Vanity of the World, and the precarious State of all Things here below.

1. Righteous Persons being the more peculiar Charge of Providence, the providential Dispensations of God towards them, do apparently, for that Reason, deserve to be more especially consider'd. That God takes care of those, who are careful to please him; that he has a Favour unto them, and which comprehends all their Interests in one Word, that he *loves* them, is confirm'd by many Declarations in Scripture. But had we no Revelation to this End, that Maxim of Holy *David* (Psal. cxlvi. 8.) *The Lord loveth the Righteous*; seems to flow with great Evidence from the Reason of the Thing, and the eternal Rectitude of his own Nature.

But above all, we are more particularly to observe the Motions of Providence, when any Event, wherewith a righteous Person is affected, has relation to the publick Interests of Mankind; whether consider'd in a religious or a civil Capacity. It being the great End of Providence to Conduct, and direct all Events towards the Good of Mankind in both these Respects, but especially the later of them; as
the

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the principal Design of God, the Design most worthy of his eternal *Power and Godhead*, is to advance the Kingdom of his Son *Jesus Christ*. A Kingdom which shall last for ever, and when all the Kingdoms of the Earth shall be destroy'd.

But what I would observe is, that a good Man, whatever his Condition in the World may be, is capable of rendring himself, in one Degree or other, subservient to both these Ends of Providence. Even in the lowest Sphere of Life, he may, by a good and pious Example, dispense a benign Influence. Society is compos'd of Particulars, and where 'tis well constituted, always makes a regular Body; the Members whereof, tho' like those of a human Body, they are severally appointed to more noble or lower Offices; yet have all of them their Use, and contribute in Proportion to the Support and Order, the Strength and Beauty of the whole.

But when righteous Persons are plac'd at the Head of this Body, whether, I say, Religious or Civil, they have still a wider Scope for the Influence both of their Example, and their Authority. Their Example indeed carries so great Authority with it, that it is often found of more Force to persuade, than their *Laws*, or those of God himself, to oblige. For we ever love to flatter our Pride, and are naturally more averse to put our selves in a State of Subjection, than to follow our own Inclinations, and embrace what we find some Beauty in that Charms us.

Now

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Now what is more lovely and attractive, than Virtue, *as it were*, alive and in Motion? She is beautiful in the *Theory*, to those very Men who do not pretend to her Service; nay those, who endeavour by their Practise to bring a Reproach upon her, are yet willing to pay her the Duty of an inward and *simple* Esteem, and on many Occasions, where their private Passions and Interests are not concern'd, to offer her some slight Sacrifice. It may be question'd, whether the Devils themselves have not abstractedly consider'd, a secret Value and Esteem for her. There must be suppos'd some kind of Order among among them, as among the most abandon'd of human Race, Thieves and Robbers. And Virtue is nothing but *Order* in Perfection, and in all the Measures and Circumstances of it.

But how lovely soever Virtue is in the Idea, she is much more engaging, when exemplify'd in human Life and Conversation: Especially when she is seen, if I may so speak, in her Ascendant, and set off with all the Advantages of an External Lustre and Dignity. For this is a sensible Argument of her Power and Excellency, and in this imperfect State, where Men so little accustom themselves to abstract Reasoning, and are so seldom capable of it, no Arguments operate so powerfully upon them, as those which come before the Senses.

It has therefore been observ'd, that the Example of the Prince has ever had the greatest Power towards corrupting or reforming the People. Some Princes indeed have been so servilely imitated, that even their bodily Deformities have been drawn into Fashion: And to
affect

affect the Loss of an Eye, or a wry Neck, has been thought at least very becoming the Complacency of a Court.

But as Men are generally more concern'd for what relates to the Advantages of the Body, than those of the Mind, the moral Defects of Princes have been much more spreading and contagious, than their Natural. As on the other Hand, where any Prince has been distinguish'd by an exemplary Virtue and Piety, the Example has seldom fail'd of discovering very good and wholsome Effects.

When therefore Princes superior in all those good Qualities, which are the proper Beauties and Ornaments of human Nature, are taken away from us, and whose Example was of so great and general Influence towards the Suppression of Vice, and Encouragement of Virtue: This, I say, is a proper Occasion of Inquiry, so far as they are in any Measure discoverable to us, into the wise Reasons of Providence; or where we are less capable of entring distinctly upon them, of doing Honour to the sovereign Power and Dominion of God. *Who doth according to his Will in the Army of the Heavens, and among the Inhabitants of the Earth.—Who giveth and taketh away; who bringeth down to the Grave, and bringeth up.—And who sealeth up the Hand of every Man, to the End, that all Men may know his Work, Job xxxvij. 7.*

2. There is something also peculiar in the Death of righteous Persons, to convince us of the Vanity of the World, and the precarious State of all Things here below. Had God design'd this World for the Scene of our Happiness, and were it really good for us to be here,

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he would have built these Tabernacles of our Body of more strong and lasting Materials. He would not so soon remove the peculiar Objects of his Favour and Love, from the Place of their Habitation, sometimes in the Flower, at other times in the Strength or first decline of Age, and that too, in the several Instances, by sudden Death. If a Death may be call'd sudden, which there has been a strict and regular Care taken to prevent the Surprise of; much less would God take away the Righteous, and at the same time seem to withdraw the usual Influences of his Love in the very Circumstances of their Death; as in those of our Blessed Saviour himself, by inflicting grievous and tormenting Pains: Pains which he alone can strengthen with Patience to undergo; and which therefore, in Proportion as they are patiently sustain'd, discover the Effects of his more immediate Presence and Support.

Yet to shew us of how little Importance a longer Term of Life, or the easy Circumstances either of Life or Death are to our true Happiness, the Providence of God, as to these Things, makes no visible Discrimination between the Righteous and the Wicked, but they grow up like *the Wheat* and *the Tares*, promiscuously together, and are cut down after an undistinguish'd Manner.

Long Life, 'tis true, tho' in the natural Order of Things, the Privilege of Virtue and Piety, yet has in Scripture the express Sanction of a Promise; and this Promise is always made good, where wise and superior Reasons of Providence do not over-rule. But where the Ends of his Providence cannot otherways
be

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be attain'd, God has reserv'd to himself an *equitable* Right of dispensing with the Letter of his Promise. Tho' it must be granted we have never more Reason, than sometimes on this very Occasion, to cry out with the Apostle. *O! the Depth of the Riches, both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his Judgments; and his Ways past finding out? For who hath known the Mind of the Lord; or who hath been his Counsellor?* Rom. xi. 33, 34.

There is indeed one Place of Scripture which seems to imply, as if it were inconsistent with the Justice of God, to subject the Good and the Wicked, to the same common Strokes of Mortality; and to make no visible Distinction in the Manner or Circumstances of their Death between them. For upon God's declaring to *Abraham* his Design of destroying *Sodom*, with all its Inhabitants; the Patriarch thus expostulates with him. *That be far from thee, to do after this Manner, to slay the Righteous with the Wicked: And that the Righteous should be as the Wicked; that be far from thee; shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?* Gen. xviii. 25.

As if he had argued; is not such a Method of Proceeding contrary to all the known Rules we have of distributive Justice? And does it not seem to flow from the Decrees of a Power wholly Arbitrary and Despotick, without any regard to Right or Wrong? And this indeed had been an invincible Argument, supposing any good Foundation for it, against such a Proceeding; for a Power that is not regulated by the Measures of what is Just, cannot be the Power either of a just, or of a wise and good God.

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Interpreters have found some Difficulty in accounting for this Passage; and the more, because *Abraham's* Argument seems to lie against known and acknowledg'd Facts. *Job* in Admiration of this ordinary Effect of Providence, expresses himself as if there were something notwithstanding very *extraordinary* and considerable in it. *This is one thing, therefore I said it, he destroyeth the Perfect, with the Wicked, Job ix. 22.*

Some therefore have thought, that in the Judgment of *Abraham*, God could not with the Safety of his Justice destroy the Righteous, that were in *Sodom*; because they were the Promises of Temporal Blessings, which at that time chiefly influenc'd the Piety and Religion of Men. But this is said precariously, and without any certain Grounds. It does not follow, that because under the Law so many temporal Advantages were promis'd to good Men, therefore good Men had a *federal* Right to them, before the Law was deliver'd.

Others have thought the Force of *Abraham's* Argument lay here; that God could not justly destroy the Righteous that were in *Sodom*, because this would have given too great and visible Discouragement to the Piety of Men. But this Argument rather affects the Wisdom and Holiness of God, than his Justice: Or if his Justice may be suppos'd indirectly affected with it; the Foundation however upon which it proceeds, is false; for it supposes that this World is the proper State of Rewards and Punishments to Men, and not only of Discipline or Probation.

But

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But I humbly take the Meaning of the Words to be, " Shall not the Judge of all the Earth
 " do the common Office of a Judge (*ὁ Πράττης*
 " *κρίτης*) in making *merciful* Allowances to
 " those, who are less Criminal, if not alto-
 " gether Innocent. Now tho' Acts of strict
 Justice may not be suppos'd Arbitrary and
 Free, yet Acts of Goodness and Mercy al-
 ways are. And it was very pious and reason-
 able in *Abraham* to expostulate with God
 concerning those Attributes, whereby he chief-
 ly delights to distinguish himself. *Abraham*, I
 say, might with great Reason and Piety move
 a good and merciful Judge to spare the Righ-
 teous that were in *Sodom*, and the Wicked them-
 selves for the sake of the Righteous; but he
 could not suppose that the Judge of all the
 Earth was oblig'd in strict Justice to do ei-
 ther.

But whether God may at any time out of
 his great Goodness and Mercy spare the Wick-
 ed here for the sake of the Righteous; yet if
 this World were intended for a State of Re-
 ward or Happiness to the Righteous, we may
 piously infer, he would grant them at least a
 much longer and happier Term of Life in it,
 both for their own Sake, and that of *other* righ-
 teous Persons.

For one of the greatest Blessings of human
 Life, lies in the Conversation and Society of
 good Men: without this one Blessing, how taste-
 less and insipid would all other temporal En-
 joyments be? I do not know whether it be pos-
 sible to frame a Notion of Hell more horrid or
 frightful, than that of a World, wherein none

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but wicked and unrighteous Men should be suffer'd to live.

Notwithstanding the Endeavours of good Men to reclaim Sinners by all proper Methods of Instruction, and the Power of their Example to soften vicious and perverse Tempers: Yet how great Reason have we to complain? That *Iniquity does still abound, and the Love of many wax Cold*. What a Spirit of Rancour and Malice, of evil Speaking and every evil Work, have we known abroad in the World? To what ill Usage are good Men sometimes expos'd, and for no other Reason, but because of their *good Qualities*: Or when it is the Interest or Inclination of a Party, that Persons of the greatest Merit, even in a publick Capacity, should be ill thought of, or hunted down, how does common Fame disguise and transform them in a Moment?

These Disorders are too frequent in the World; tho' there are, blest be God, great Numbers of Men, who have both Religion and good Sense; and are not wanting in the common Offices of Humanity and good Nature. But yet in Proportion, as the Number of righteous Persons is diminish'd, the Corruptions that are in the World thro' Lust, gather Strength, and spread so much the wider.

These Reflections naturally arise upon the Death of good Men, in every State and Condition of Life; tho' they are still more affecting, when Persons of distinguish'd Piety move in a higher Sphere. But when righteous Princes, who have had nothing so much at Heart, as the true Interests of Religion, and the State, when those who are call'd Gods, by reason of the
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the Power and Authority they derive from the true and living God, are seen to dye like Men! When the great Luminaries of the moral World are extinguish'd; or to speak in the Prophetical Language, when the Stars of Heaven, and the Constellations thereof cease to give their Light! Such a dark and melancholy State of Things, is proper to remind us of the Vanity of the World in a more awakening Manner, and to fill the Mind with mournful and solemn Apprehensions; not as if some great Funeral Apartment, but the whole World about us were hung were *Sable*. But,

Secondly, The Death of righteous Persons is proper to teach us the Duty of Humiliation for our Sins.

There is something very grave and solemn, and which cannot fail of humbling considerate Persons in the very Thoughts of Death. To *Die*, is to act the last Part towards that mighty Change, upon which an Eternity of Happiness or Misery depends. The proper Business of a dying Person is therefore to consider, that his Soul is now requir'd of him; and how he shall be able to render an Account of all his Thoughts, Words and Actions, at the Tribunal of that all-knowing, all-powerful and just God; before whom he is preparing immediately to appear. And this indeed is a Consideration of such infinite Weight, that even the best of Men, under the visible Approach of Death, and whose Hopes *are full of Immortality*, yet in recommending their Souls into the Hands

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of a merciful God, are sometimes observ'd to *rejoyce with Trembling.*

The Theory of Death naturally leads to these, or the like Reflections; and they are all very proper to humble us in the Sight of God for our Sins, that when it is our time of preparing to meet him; which cannot be very far from any of us: The Testimony of a good Conscience may give us greater Assurance, and *Boldness of Access*, in that Day, towards him.

But these Considerations are proper in particular to humble *the Pride of Life*; and take us down in our Thoughts of what we here call Power and Greatness; seeing the greatest *Goodness*, in full Possession of them, can receive from them, at that Exigence, no Relief or Protection; nor indeed any Comfort, but what arises from the Reflection of having employ'd them to good, pious and useful Ends.

But what I principally intend is, that the Death of any Person eminently Righteous, and in an eminent Station, is a proper Occasion of humbling us, consider'd under the Notion of a Judgment. Good Princes, to pursue the main Scope of my Discourse, are the greatest Blessings to Mankind upon Earth. They are so in the natural Order and Effects of their Administration. As the Rights of publick Communities, and private Persons are hereby secur'd, Arts and Sciences encourag'd; and above all, the Interests of Religion taken Care of, and promoted. Of Religion, which lays the surest Foundation for *the Stability of the Times*, as our Prophet expresses it, (*Chap. xxxij. 5.*) and in all Respects, for the Happiness and Prosperity of

of any People; So that had we no Revelation to confirm it to us, it seems to be a Maxim flowing from the visible and direct Tendency of Things, That *Righteousness exaltes a Nation.*

But good Princes are still greater Blessings to a Nation on a *Providential* Account. As their Hearts are in the Hand of God, and he is with them in all their Designs, Resolutions and Actions; as he presides in their Counsels, goes forth with their Fleets and Armies; fights their Battles; gives them the Victory and the Spirit of Wisdom to improve it. Towards which great Ends, without his Superintendence and Direction, all the Precaution and Schemes, all the Bravery and Strength, the Address and Penetration of Men, would be of no Significancy.

In a State of War particularly, Generals have always thought it necessary to possess the Armies they Commanded with a Belief, that the Dispositions of Providence were favourable to them. And where there was no reasonable Foundation for such a Belief, have frequently made use of little Artifices, in order to persuade to it.

Alexander the Great, tho' no Prince affected more to Conquer by Dint of Sword, yet did not disdain upon Occasion to employ a pious Fraud. In passing the River *Granicus*, observing his Men to be seiz'd with a superstitious Fear, from the Name of the Mouth, which was thought unfortunate to them, he privately gave Directions to *Aristander*, his Soothsayer in Chief, that he should write with a certain Liquor on the Liver of the Victim, *The Gods have granted Alexander the Victory*; This fir'd his Men with
a new

a new Ardor, and they were easily persuaded to push a Conquest, which Heaven had already proclaim'd. Again, a little before the Battle of *Arbela*, when an Eclipse of the Moon had put his Men into so great Consternation, that they began out of mere Religion to Mutiny; This Hero observing, that there was no other way of recovering them out of the Disorder, but by driving one Superstition with another, he procur'd the *Egyptian* Astrologers, in great Reputation at that time for expounding Omens, to give out; That the *Greeks* were under the Protection of the Sun, but the *Persians* of the Moon. And that an Eclipse of this Planet, always portended some signal Calamity or Disgrace to the *Persians*. By this Artifice *Alexander* soon compos'd the Spirits of his Men, and restor'd a new Face of Things in the Army.

I only mention these two Stories among many others, for the Moral of them; which is to shew of how great Force even the Belief of God's special Favour and Protection is to any Nation or People; But that good Princes, *Princes just, and ruling in the Fear of God*, give the People committed to their Charge, auspicious and real Grounds for such a Belief.

When therefore God deprives a Nation of so great Blessings, and upon whom their Hopes of Success were so piously founded; This is to be consider'd by them, as a publick and providential Judgment; but from which they have still much less to apprehend; when righteous Princes are succeeded by those, who have form'd a Resolution of pursuing the same Paths of Right.

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Righteousness, and of inviolably maintaining the Interests both of Religion and the State.

Now the End of God's visiting the World with any publick Calamity, is to render Men more sensible, that they have provok'd him by their Sins; but that he will not *always* be provok'd; that this is the proper Season therefore of their humbling themselves before him; *of turning unto him, that smiteth them, and seeking the Lord of Hosts, Isa. ix. 12, 13.*

It is the greatest Argument at once of Stupidity of Mind and Obduracy of Heart, when God hath smitten, and Men have not grieved; it is adding to their Crimes the highest Aggravation they are capable of, that of *Contumacy*. Especially after Sinners have long and publickly provok'd the Displeasure of Almighty God, the last Thing they seem capable of, in order to fill up the Measure of their Sins, is to *despise his Chastnings*.

What therefore we in particular, of this Kingdom, have incumbent on us, under a Sense of our common and late Calamity, in the Death of a most Excellent and Righteous QUEEN, is without delay, to *break off our Sins by Righteousness*; and as the Prophet *Jeremiah* exhorts, to *return, now, every one from his evil Way; and to make his Ways and his Doings good*, Chap. xviii. 11.

These are the most proper Measures we can enter upon, in order long to avert the like Judgment of God from us; and to prevent our incurring that severe Commination by *Solomon*, Prov. xxviii. 2. *For the Transgression of a Land many are the Princes thereof*. May we rather by a general and sincere Reformation intitule our
selves

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selves to the Blessing promis'd in the latter part of the Verse, which we have, thank God, so bright and happy a Prospect of, That, by a Man of Understanding and Knowledge, shall the State of a Land, be prolong'd.

I have explain'd the Text, and recommended some of the proper Duties both of Reflection and Humiliation, arising from the Scope of it : And I doubt not but every one here present, has already made particular Application of what has been said, with respect to the Death of righteous Persons, and righteous Princes in general. But on occasion of the Death of Queen ANNE, and for which Her late Interment, amidst all our joyful Expectations, has given us fresh Impressions of Sorrow ; I desire, how unequal soever to the Subject, to say something more particularly, in a short Essay upon Her Character, as solely comprehending that of a righteous Prince. For to consider it at large, and in all the Lights of it, were I capable of such a View, would carry me far beyond my present Bounds.

Righteousness, comprehends under it, the three general Duties of Justice, Piety, and Charity. Our late Excellent Sovereign distinguish'd her self eminently, and after a most exemplary manner, in all these respects.

1. It must be acknowledg'd indeed, that Princes have sometimes just Reasons for their Conduct, which it is impossible for those, who do not know the secret Springs of Action, to make a true Judgment of ; infinite Emergencies, upon occasion of what is transacted in foreign Courts or their Own, and which ought not, in many Cases,

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Cases, to be made Publick, may justify several Measures, which the People in general cannot, upon Sight, fully account for.

It is an Honour therefore, we owe to the Prince, where Evidence does not oblige us to the contrary, to acquiesce in his Conduct, as proceeding upon Reasons both of *Justice* and *Wisdom*; otherwise we judge, which we should never do, in any Case whatever, without Light; or rather, we do not follow the Light, which should guide us, but put our selves before it. We should therefore consider the particular Motives of Justice, upon which the Sovereign Power acts, among the *Arcana Imperii*, those Secrets of Government, which yet if we may be permitted, at a distance, to enquire into, we should express a Caution and Reverence in our Inquiries, due to Things Sacred; which I take to be the Design of that judicious Expostulation of *Elihu*, Job xxxiv. 17. *Is it fit to say to a King, Thou art wicked? or to Princes, Ye are ungodly?*

But there are other Reasons of Justice in the Conduct of Princes, which fall more under private Cognizance and Observation. And in all these the late Queen, of blessed Memory, was a very bright and illustrious Precedent; She made the Laws agreeable to the Trust repos'd in Her, the Rule and Measure of Her Administration. There was no one Instance of Her exerting an Arbitrary Act, throughout the whole Course of Her Reign, or of any thing like it. She consider'd Herself as God's Minister, and as a *Power* Ordain'd of God: But she could not have Govern'd with more regard to the Good and Interests of Her People, supposing Her Authority to have had no higher Foundation, than what
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some People would resolve all Civil Authority into, *the mere Ordinance of Man*. I shall be justify'd in what I am going to add, That She never, knowingly, employ'd Her Prerogative, but to such Ends, which discover'd we should have had nothing to fear from the Exercise of Her Power, had it really been Despotick.

She ratify'd a great many wholsom and good Laws; but because 'tis the Executive Power which puts Life into them, and makes them operate, she omitted no proper Occasion of recommending to Her subordinate Ministers, and especially to those, who had a Hand in the Legislature, the strict and faithful Execution of them. But of all the Laws enacted in Her Reign, none were more Salutary than one of those She gave Her last Sanction to, and so near to Her last Moments. As if God had design'd it a proper Preparative to Her entring into the *Communion of Saints* above, that She should then give the finishing Power to an Act so necessary to preserve the Unity of his Church, and to prevent those scandalous Disorders which visibly tend, by confirming them in their Prejudices, to hinder *Schismatics* from returning into the Bosom of it.

In dispensing of Rewards, She had always a regard to Merit, or what was represented to Her under that Notion. Where any Persons had eminently serv'd Her, their Country, or the Church, She was rather inclin'd to exceed in Her Favours; and even to consider what was in them, Matter of strict and indispensible Duty, as laying a kind of honourable Debt; I had almost said, a Debt of *Gratitude* upon Her.

She

She was very cautious of misleading those, who had the Honour of addressing any Request to Her, into false Expectations; and never made a Promise, but She consider'd it as an Obligation. And herein She was so nicely tender, that where there was a manifest Failure in that Duty and Respect which, in the Reason of the Thing, gave a Dispensation from Her Promise, yet She could not, without great Difficulty, if *at all*, be persuaded to dispense, in it, with Her Self.

If there was any Act of distributive Justice, to which She was less prompt or inclin'd, it related to the Punishment of Delinquents; but proceeded from a Temper more agreeable to that of Heaven itself; more peculiar to the Clemency of Her Family; the Tenderness of Her Sex, and the Spirit of that Church, whereof She had liv'd and dy'd so great an Ornament; of that excellent Church, which She so faithfully *Confess'd* and Adher'd to in the Day of Tryal, and for whose Interests She was willing to forget *Her Father's House*, and to Sacrifice one of the most tender Passions of human Nature; But to the Impressions whereof, an uncommon *Piety* render'd Her still more sensible.

If in any of the respects here mention'd, there might possibly have been any Error in Her Administration, and what Administration is free from all Error? This ought not to be plac'd to Her own Account, but to the unhappy Circumstances which Princes, and almost all great Men in Power, are under; in being, after a manner, oblig'd, on many Occasions, to make wrong Judgments. For having no other way of Judg-
ing,

ing, but by the Representations of those about them, which are not always the most candid and sincere; it is no wonder, if they sometimes be led into Mistakes, and particularly in conferring, or with-holding their Favours.

2. In all the Duties and Offices of Piety towards God, our late Excellent Sovereign, who is now with him, was no less Exemplary. The publick Monuments She has left us of Her Piety, and which are rising every Day still higher and higher, may possibly last till the World itself shall be no more. But Her Zeal for God's Honour, did not terminate in a provident Care for the publick Places of his Worship; it extended to those who should Minister in them: She contributed what She was able, to retrieve the Dignity of the Sacred Order, from that Poverty, under which it suffers so much; and which, indeed, is one of the greatest and most common Imputations that wicked and prophane Men find themselves capable of objecting to it.

In Her Devotions She discover'd a Fervor, which is proper to Persons truly Pious: And She was frequent in them, as the State of Her Health, or other justifiable Avocations would admit. It was Her Delight to come before the Lord, to keep his Sabbaths, and reverence his Sanctuary; and She never omitted any part of religious Sacrifice, where She had not a Dispensation for Reasons of *Mercy*, or some other moral Virtue, wherein to obey, was *better than Sacrifice*.

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She seems to have form'd Her Conduct, in relation to Her Domesticks, upon the same noble and pious Resolution with that of *Joshua*, ch. xxiv. 15. *As for me, and my House, we will serve the Lord.* Her Family was a Family of Devotion, so far as Her Authority or Example, or a Distinction in conferring her Favours, could contribute to make it so.

Her Behaviour in the Service of God, was Humble, but Awful and Solemn; and such as testify'd an inward Sense of the Duty She was performing, and the Presence She was in. The Presence of that Great and All-glorious Being, who fills Heaven and Earth with his Majesty; and before whom, when we consider in the least, where we are, all the Ideas of sensible Pomp and Grandeur, must necessarily vanish. Her Piety to add no more was such, that the most Pious of those who Ministred to Her in Things pertaining to God, were profited by it.

3. Her Alms ascended no less continually up, as a Memorial before God, than Her Prayers. She knew that these were the Sacrifices wherewith God was pleas'd, and for that reason, as well as from a natural Benignity of Mind, took the greatest Pleasure in them Her Self. For She was inclin'd to Acts of Beneficence, not merely as a Duty of positive Command, or as the Apostle significantly expresses it, *of Necessity*; but of Complacency and Chearfulness. She perfectly obey'd the Apostle's Charge, if She might be said to be charg'd with what She so freely made Her Choice, and was *glad* to Distribute, *willing* to Communicate, *1 Tim. vj. 18.*

If the publick Occasions or Her private Liberalities, might possibly, at any time, lay a Restraint on Her bountiful Inclinations, She would discover a Compassion worthy of a Temper truly Christian; and could not deny any thing, but after a manner more Obliging, than most Persons know how to confer a Favour. In a Word, She did not think the Dignity of a Crown exempted Her from the common Duties and Condescension of a Christian, *in considering the Poor*; but rather, suppos'd Her Self oblig'd, from the Height and Advantage of Her Station, to disperse more liberally abroad, and lay up for Her Self a good Foundation against the Time to come, that She might lay hold of *Eternal Life*.

I have only consider'd, and in a very imperfect manner, some of the Moral Duties, or rather Christian Graces, wherein the late Queen was so Eminent and Exemplary. I have said nothing of the many glorious Events of Her Reign, these are already the Subject of Volumes, and do not properly fall under the Notion of Moral Virtue: Except perhaps, in general, it ought to have been put to the Account of Her Piety, That, throughout the whole Course of Her Reign, She was attended with so surprizing Success and Felicity; and, That we all along enjoy'd the Blessings of Plenty; and even to appearance, those of Peace, during the Time of a most *Glorious, Consuming War*, which yet She was enabled, at last, to put a happy Period to; the Happier in this respect, that it visibly made way for the more easy and free Accession of our present Sovereign to the Throne.

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But to conclude: Let us at length, lay aside all those intemperate Heats and Animosities, which neither become us as Men, as Christians, or good Subjects. Let us Unite in all Brotherly Love and Charity one towards another, and in all dutiful Subjection to the King whom Providence has set over us, and who comes with the most favourable Dispositions to meet a People, the most faithfully and unanimously dispos'd to receive him. But then let us Obey him out of a pure Principle of Religion, and for *Conscience-sake*. An Obedience which proceeds only from Private or Party-Regards, is not to be depended on: No Hold can be taken of Men, who act upon no Principle: We know not where to have such Men; and indeed they do not know themselves, any further than for the present Emergency, what they are, or wherewith they will be satisfy'd.

It must be granted, that the Subject of Government, in relation to the Measures of Obedience, is very nice; those who are for carrying them to the greatest Height, do not do it, in favour of Tyranny, which they abhor; but because there must be somewhere, of necessity, a last Resort of Power, and they can have no Idea of a Contradiction, or of any Authority Superior to the Supreme.

But take which side of the Question you please, it will be agreed on all Hands, that Obedience to the Prince, must be founded on some standing and conscientious Principle. To withhold or pay our Obedience, according as the State of Affairs may suit with our Schemes or Inclinations, is not really to obey the Prince, but to prescribe to him; and, in effect, to place our selves above him.

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The best Security therefore of our Obedience to the King, is to fear God and keep his Commandments; those Commandments in particular, which require Subjection to the higher Powers, as the Ordinance and Ministers of God. This is a Principle of Obedience, which does not vary with the uncertain Caprice of Men given to Change, but stands upon a firm unchangeable Foundation; and obliges us to be Obedient to him, who is our supreme *Master, according to the Flesh*, (It is the Apostle's Expression) *in singleness of Heart, as unto Christ. — with good Will, doing Service, as unto the Lord, and not unto Men.* Or in the Words of *St. Peter*, wherewith I shall conclude, *as Free, and not using our Liberty for a Cloak of Maliciousness, but as the Servants of God,* 1 Pet. ij. 16.

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SERMON XIII.

That both Poverty and Riches are from God ; and in what respects a moderate Fortune may be more eligible, than an indigent or great One.

PROV. XXX. 8.

— Give me neither Poverty nor Riches. —

THese Words of *Agur* may very easily be accounted for, so far as they relate to *Poverty*: That being a State of Life attended with so many visible and great Inconveniencies, that there is no Evil in the World, the Idea whereof ordinarily strikes the Mind with more terrible and shocking Apprehensions. Sin, which is a moral Evil, and in that respect indeed more to be fear'd, than the natural Evil of Poverty, or all the miserable Effects of it put together; yet is

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what Men chuse too often to commit, in order to avoid those Effects. It was very natural then, and indeed most reasonable for *Agur* to Pray, that his Condition of Life, if God so pleas'd, might not be Poor or Necessitous.

But the reasonableness of his Prayer, in the other Branch of it, against *Riches*, does not appear altogether so clear or evident. For Riches, contributing in such variety of Instances to the Happiness of human Life, and being also, on many Accounts, very subservient to the Ends of Piety and Religion, it may seem strange, that so Pious and Prudent a Person, should here make it his Request to God, that he might not have the Command of a rich and plentiful Fortune. If there be any Difficulty in what is here observ'd, the Sequel of my Discourse upon the Words, will give a full Solution to it; and herein I shall observe the following Method.

I. I shall shew, That it is to the Special and Over-ruling Providence of God, we are to ascribe both Poverty and Riches.

II. That a middle State of Life is, to some Persons, and on certain Accounts, more eligible than either Poverty or Riches.

III. I shall conclude with some Arguments, which may be proper to teach us an intire submission to the Will of God, whichsoever of these three States he may think fit to appoint us.

i. That it is to the special and over-ruling Providence of God, we are to ascribe both Poverty and Riches. This is a Truth, which all Men are very ready to acknowledge in general,
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but which in Cases of more near and immediate Concernment to them, they often appear to Question or Disbelieve. As to any unhappy Accidents or Disappointments which may reduce them to Poverty, here indeed they are more forward to charge the Occasion of it wholly upon Providence, and to excuse themselves from having had any Share in contributing towards it. All this is very agreeable to the natural Pride and Vanity of Man, whereby he is continually excited to justify himself in every thing; and where he cannot satisfy his own Mind, yet would appear to others, as if there were nothing, wherewith it could justly Charge or Reproach him. The Case is different, when a Man succeeds in the Methods he takes to enrich himself. For here, that very Pride which made him more willing to acknowledge the Providence of God, in bringing any Misfortunes upon him, does now incline him to exclude, or however to think more detractingly of it; and rather to attribute his Success to his own Prudence, Industry, or Merit. To shew, how apt Men are to bear themselves high upon a smooth and happy Run of their Affairs, we need no other Proofs, than the many Cautions which are in that Case made use of in Scripture, to correct and take them down.

The Necessity of believing that it is God who *maketh Poor*, and *maketh Rich*, appears farther from hence, That the different Circumstances of Men, in these two respects, are often owing to what we call Chance or Accident. For there is no Man, but who, in the course of his Life, has had opportunities, more or less, of observing, That some favourable and unexpected Emer-

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gencies, have been of greater Force, in order to the Success of his Designs, than all the visible and ordinary Means of effecting them; nay, there are Instances, wherein the very Errors and Indiscretion of Men have turn'd, by some happy Casualty or other, to their Advantage; As there have been Persons on the other Hand, whose very Prudence, in the Conduct of their Affairs, has sometimes accidentally occasion'd their Miscarriages.

What I would argue from hence is, That seeing the good or ill Fortune of Men, to speak the common Dialect, is so much owing to Accidents; Except we should suppose God the Dispenser of Poverty and Riches, we must exempt Events of a contingent Nature from the Government, and Direction of his Providence; and then we may not only acquire Wealth, or be reduc'd to an indigent Condition, without admitting his Providence, but most of the other external Blessings or Evils of Life, may also befall us exclusively of it; there being indeed very few of them, in the Distribution whereof, *Chance* has not, on one occasion or other, a considerable Share. Now, if we suppose that God do at all concern himself in the Government of Mankind, it will of Necessity follow, That his Providence must extend to those things, on which the Happiness or Misery of Men so ordinarily depend in this Life, and sometimes extraordinary and publick Revolutions.

But if we cast our Eyes forward upon another Life, and consider our selves here more peculiarly as in a State of Probation for it, the Reasons of acknowledging God, the dispenser of Riches and Poverty, will still appear more
Strong

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Strong and Convincing. For it is evident these two different States have both of them very different Effects upon us, with regard to Religion.

Perhaps there is nothing in the World, that influences our Piety, or obstructs the Progress of it more, than the narrow or plentiful Circumstances of Fortune wherein we are plac'd: And the Reason is, That both these Circumstances are attended with their peculiar Temptations, and on both sides so Strong and Powerful, that moral Writers have found it difficult to determine, by which of them our Innocence is most endanger'd. And indeed the Resolution of this Point, does not so much depend on our Considering abstractedly, and in general, what the Disadvantages of a poor or a prosperous Condition are, as what in either Condition the particular Tempers and Dispositions of Men may be. Now, tho' we should allow, if there be no Impiety in the concession, that the Providence of God does not so immediately Interest itself in directing those Events, which only relate to the Affairs of this Life, that are in comparison of little Importance to Mankind: Yet as to those things, which tend to promote or hinder the Design of God, in preparing Men for a State of endless and unspeakable Happiness: A Design superior to all others in the Divine Oeconomy. Here, I say, we must necessarily infer, that the Providence of God is concern'd in a more eminent Manner, to interpose and exert itself. If God have any regard to the Good of Mankind, he will, without doubt, have all the Means of promoting their eternal and supreme Good

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Good more especially under his Inspection and Government.

All these Considerations are of great Use to shew us, That in the several Changes of their Fortune here incident to Men, it is God *who giveth* and who *taketh away*. But they are not from hence to argue, that it is therefore better to lay aside all Care of improving their Fortunes, or preventing the Ruin of them, and so leave the Event wholly to Providence. For tho' God does determine and dispose of all Events, as in his wise and good Providence he sees fit; yet the most probable and likely Means of Success, in the course of human Affairs, ordinarily succeed. We are to follow the general Laws of God, which are proper to give us great Ideas both of his *Wisdom* and *Goodness*; and yet it is as necessary he should sometimes frustrate the Endeavours and best form'd Designs of Men, to convince them more effectually, that he is *God*, and to establish in their Minds a more awful Sense of his *Power*. But besides, that it is *the Hand of the diligent*, which according to the general Order of Providence, *maketh rich*: Diligence is of itself so necessary to our present State, to the Preservation, on many Accounts; of our Innocence, and to the good Order and Government of the World; that tho' God without human Means and Endeavours can, if he thinks fit, do every thing for us; yet except we employ them, we can have no pious or reasonable Expectations from his Providence, of succeeding in any thing.

Secondly, That a middle State of Life is, to some Persons, and on certain Accounts, more eligi-

eligible than either Poverty or Riches. Few Persons will dispute this, in reference to Poverty, which is not only a very miserable Condition in its direct and immediate Effects, but what to all other incidental Miseries of Life, gives still a greater Force and Pungency. There are some indeed, who from a mistaken Zeal for Religion, out of pure Choice, make Poverty their Profession; and publickly affect to put on the Face, and appear in the Habit of it. But besides, that this Zeal is not according to Knowledge, and that Men cannot really be serviceable to the great Ends of Piety and Religion, in an idle or monastick, as in an active Life. It is to be consider'd, that such Persons do not chuse Poverty, because it is not an Evil, but for this very Reason, because it is an *Evil*; and to the End they may have a more signal Occasion of recommending themselves to the Favour of God, by so heroick, and in their Opinion, meritorious an Act of Piety. But this is only an Opinion, without any true Grounds from Reason, or Authority from the Scriptures to support it: It being indeed, both agreeable to the common Principles of Humanity, and the Design of the reveal'd Religion, that Men should render themselves Useful and Beneficial, as they possibly can, in Society, no reasonable or pious Man can be suppos'd to prefer a State of Life, in which, let his other Qualifications be ever so great, he will be much less capable of exerting them to the common Good and Benefit of Mankind.

That Command of our Saviour to the young Man in the Gospel, so often alledg'd in favour of a voluntary Poverty, was peculiar to him;
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he was very bold and sanguine in his Pretensions to Religion, and had already given such Proofs of it, as might appear in some measure to excuse his Confidence. But our Lord, who knew *what was in Man*, took the Occasion of putting him to the Trial, in an Instance the most affecting of it self, and probably the most opposite to the young Man's particular Temper and Inclination. *Go and sell all that thou hast, and give to the Poor.* Now these Words may indeed, serve for a general and excellent Caution to Men, against Presumption; and this, it may be, was our Lord's principal Design in them: Yet the Command itself is so far from obliging Christians indifferently, that it ought not to be drawn in to Example; and for this further Reason, that no Man ought to put himself in a State of tempting God; which yet every Man does who, by the distribution of all he has for the Relief of other Persons, is reduc'd to an immediate dependance upon some extraordinary interposals of Providence for his own Relief.

Should this Command of our Saviour be repeated to any one of us in particular, there could be no Question, whether he ought to pay a ready and cheerful Obedience to it? God has a Right, whenever he pleases, to resume what he has committed to our Trust; but it does not therefore follow, that we can do with it as we please our selves, but only in such Ways and to such Ends as are most fit and reasonable, pursuant to the Will and Intention of God.

It must be granted, there are several passages of Scripture, which speak very advantageously of poor People; the State of Christianity, when it was Preach'd, reduc'd those who embrac'd

brac'd it, in most Cases, to an unavoidable Necessity of chusing a State of Poverty. The very Condition upon which they became the Disciples of Christ was, That they should deny themselves and take up their Cross; and where there might be a Necessity for it, that they should be ready to part with Houses and Lands, and forsake all, to follow him. And should Christians, by any just Judgment of God, or for the Trial of their Constancy, be ever brought under a like Necessity either of sacrificing the greatest Interest they have in this Life, or of denying the Faith in any Article of it, it is a plain Case, on which Side they ought to determine themselves. But since Christianity is now settled in the World, and become the Religion of States and Kingdoms, as the Occasion upon which in its Infancy, Christians were so generally reduc'd to prefer a State of Poverty is now ceas'd, the Reasons of such a Preference are manifestly ceas'd with it.

I do not speak this as if Men were in any great danger of following a Command, that does not oblige them, and which there would be the greatest difficulty in persuading them to follow, if it really did: But only to shew, that tho' we are to account it Matter of Joy, when we fall into any Temptation, by reason of a firm and resolute Adherence to our Duty, yet when we voluntarily expose our selves to needless or dangerous Trials in any kind, we have nothing to say in Excuse of our Temerity, or to hope from an extraordinary Grace of God towards the support of our Innocence.

If there be no Grounds from Reason or Scripture to render a State of Poverty eligible,
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the Authority of certain Philosophers, in this Point, will be of very little Weight. Some of them, 'tis granted, made it their Business to decry Riches, and argu'd as well as they could, those Things are Contemptible, without which, even the greatest Merit will be very difficultly secur'd from Contempt: Tho' what they said on this Article, is not so much to be attributed to their Judgment, as to the invincible Passion they had in general for vain Glory. Men of haughty and aspiring Minds, desire a Name of Distinction in the World; but some extraordinary Qualities or Actions being, for the most part, necessary to establish such a Name, and draw the Eyes of the Publick upon them, where they are conscious, that they cannot distinguish themselves in the usual and regular way, they have recourse to such Artifices wherein there may appear at least to be something very Uncommon and Surprising.

Now almost all Mankind being sensible of the Advantages of Riches, and for that reason continually pursuing after them; these Philosophers thought there was something however, that had a great Shew of Resolution and Magnanimity, in their opposing themselves to so general, and as they endeavour'd to represent it, very corrupt Judgment of Mankind.

They had yet a farther occasion of gratifying their Pride, by the Methods they took to cry up Poverty, and vilify Riches: For hereby they gave the People to understand, that they not only challeng'd a Regard superior to that, which Men, who were born to great Estates, or had acquir'd them, could justly expect, but they affected in some sort to be like the Gods, whose Sovereign

veign Priviledge, according to the common Notions of Mankind, was to want nothing. In short, the Pride of Man is so very Artful and Designing, that where he is not possess'd of any Qualities that are really valuable, it often supplies Arguments that appear to him very Specious, why he ought to value himself even upon the Want of them : And therefore it is not improbable that *Seneca*, if he had been reduc'd to the same Straits with *Diogenes*, and other poor Philosophers, would not only have said a great many fine Things, in order to support Men under Circumstances of Poverty or Distress, but have also been Bitter as any of them, in his Invectives against Riches: Yet herein he was oblig'd to be more Sparing and Reserv'd, out of a decent regard to his own splendid and vast Fortune.

But it is unnecessary to insist further on the Reasonableness of *Agur's* Prayer, with respect to Poverty ; the great Difficulty lies in accounting for the Preference which he here gives a middle State of Life, to Riches : For rich Men have not only in their own Disposition, the Means of procuring some of the most valuable Enjoyments of Life, but either wholly of averting, or in great measure of alleviating some of the greatest Calamities here incident to us : But above all Considerations, to render Riches still of more Importance, they are represented in Scripture as the Favours of Providence, and set before Men as proper Rewards to encourage their Obedience. It may then seem strange, that *Agur* should Pray against a Condition of Life which God, for these Reasons, has render'd both a lawful and desirable Object of their Prayers.

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I know no other way of accounting for this Difficulty, but by saying, That these Words are not to be understood, which yet they usually are, as a general Precedent to Men, for what they should Wish or Desire of God, in reference to their present Condition of Life, but as there was something which occasion'd them, peculiar to the Disposition and Circumstances which *Agur* was in at that time : And therefore, what I principally design'd to shew is, That to some Persons, and on certain Accounts, a moderate Fortune is notwithstanding, better to be chosen than great Riches : And I conceive, for the several Reasons already mention'd, there is a Necessity of explaining the Words with this limitation.

1. The different Tempers of Men are to be consulted in whatever they desire, in this World, how just or lawful soever the Thing desir'd may be in itself : And the Reason is, that external Objects owe the great Power they have to corrupt us, to the Force of our Inclinations from within : And as there is scarce any Person who has not his predominant Passion, he ought more peculiarly to guard, where he knows himself most Defenceless and Expos'd. *All Things*, says the wise Son of *Syrach*, *are not Profitable for all Men*; there being a thousand Things which other Persons may allow themselves in with Safety, Innocence, and Reputation, from which, if we would not ruin our selves in all these respects, we ought to keep, as much as we are able, at a distance. And therefore, it is our Duty on all Occasions, and we have the Authority of *St. Paul* for what is so obvious in the Reason of the
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the Thing, not only to consider what may be simply and in general *Lawful*, but what in our private Case is, upon the whole Matter, really *Expedient*. When a Man, for Instance, is under the Power of any particular violent Passion, which Riches are the ready, and, it may be, the only Means he can propose of gratifying; if he would not fall into a Temptation and a Snare, out of which he has no probable way of Escaping, and wherein the Foundation of his eternal Misery may be laid; he ought, nay, if he have the least regard to his own Safety, instead of impatiently desiring to be Rich, he will pray with *Agur*, That God in his good Providence may not give him Riches: For if we sometimes find it so difficult to stifle or resist those criminal Inclinations, which we have not the Power or Opportunity to indulge, what is likely to become of us, when the Means of Indulging them are at Hand, and intirely at our own Command?

2. There are also accidental *Circumstances* which may render Riches much less, if at all, proper to be desir'd. In a State of Persecution, or where Men are in danger of being put to any severe Trial of their Affections between God and the World, the more they are disengag'd from those Things, on which the Pomp and Pleasures of Life depend, the happier Disposition they are in to choose the *better Part*, and discharge their Duty with a good Conscience.

Upon the first Plantation of the Gospel, it was hard indeed for rich Men to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, or become Converts to the Christian Faith: Those that were sensible to

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the Advantages of the World, and lov'd it, could not relish that severe Condition, as it appear'd to them, of *forsaking all, to follow Christ*. And while they continued in this Temper of Mind, it was, in a strict Sense, as impossible for them sincerely to profess themselves Christians, *as for a Camel to go through the Eye of a Needle*. And the same Reasons which at that time hindered Men from professing Christianity, sometimes occasion'd afterwards their Defection wholly, or in part from it. And for this Reason it may possibly be, that some occasional Passages in Scripture, which seem to bear hard on rich Men, and to represent their Condition as very dangerous, are to be explain'd with respect to the State of Christianity at that time, and not to be extended indifferently to rich Men, in the settled and succeeding Ages of the Church.

A Capacity of doing Good, being the great End for which Riches appear so desirable, where a Man in any Station of Life, is more useful to the Publick, than there are moral Assurances he would be by a removal out of it, or by a flow of Fortune, which might raise him above it: In this Case too, he has great reason to be satisfy'd with the decent and ordinary Conveniencies of Life, without enlarging his Desires any further upon the World: For in civil Life, we are not so much to consider what may be most agreeable to our particular Interests or Designs, as what may render us of greater and more general Use to Mankind.

And this Consideration should still have greater Weight with every Man, in proportion as he has fewer Engagements upon him, from
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the Circumstances of his Family or Dependants. The Necessity of *providing for his own*, is what Nature pleads very strongly to every Man; but with some Men she now and then carries her Argument so far, that it proves too much: For under a Pretence of discharging this natural and necessary Duty, they become insensible to the Miseries and Wants of other People; and are either in great measure diverted from performing the common Offices of Humanity, or at the best, perform them after a more slight, sparing, and illiberal manner.

But such Persons are still more inexcusable who are, in a manner, arbitrary in the Disposition of their Fortune, or are less press'd upon by Dependencies; when instead of doing Good, and rejoicing in what they already possess, they are continually laying themselves out in heaping up Riches, without knowing to what End, or who shall gather them. It is a very natural and lively Image which *Solomon* has drawn of a Person enslav'd with the Love of the World, and without the visible and ordinary Reasons pretended for it: *There is*, says he, *One alone, and there is not a Second; yea, he hath neither Child nor Brother; yet there is no End of all his Labour, neither is his Eye satisfy'd with Riches: Neither, saith he, for whom do I labour, and bereave my Soul of Good. This is also Vanity, yea it is a sore Travel*, Eccles. iv. 8.

But to shew us that there is something strangely infatuating in the Love of Riches, it is generally observ'd to be the most strong and violent in the Decays of Age, and where, one would think, there should be the least Provocation to it. There are, without doubt, very

wise Reasons of Providence for the several Passions, more peculiarly incident to us, in the several Periods of Life: And thus particularly, with respect to Anger, or a Temper more inclining to Peevishness in old Men, it seems very wisely design'd by Nature, to excite the Particles of the Blood, which are then grown more languid, in order to make it circulate more briskly, and prevent the stagnation of it. But that old Men, who have long experienc'd the Vanity of the World; who are incapable of its Enjoyments were they really more Satisfactory, and upon the Point of leaving them for ever; whose Hopes, in a Word, ought to be *full of Immortality*, and directed upon a State, the Happiness whereof admits of no Allay or Intermision, of no Mixture or Measure; that Men, I say, at such a Time, should entertain a Passion for Riches, so very unsuitable in all these respects to the Circumstances they are under, is what we cannot easily resolve into any wise or good Reasons whatever; but should rather, indeed, account such a Passion, if not directly impious, yet at least very foolish and preposterous.

And there is great probability that when *Agur* does here deprecate Riches, he consider'd himself more particularly, with regard to these Circumstances: *Two Things*, says he, in the foregoing Verse, *have I requir'd of thee; deny me them not, before I Die*: As if the nearer and sensible Approaches which Death was making towards him, had rendred it his more special and seasonable Duty to take off his Thoughts from the Things of this World, and turn them upon that endless State, he was going speedily to enter upon.

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Upon these or the like Considerations, a moderate Fortune, which supplies the Conveniences of Life, may be really more eligible to a good Man, than a great and splendid Fortune. But this does not make *Agur's* Prayer Matter of standing Obligation, or in general, render it culpable for Men to desire Riches; for the Advantages of them are so evident, that Men see and feel, and taste them every Moment; so that in Truth, to decry Riches, is to arraign the common Sense of Mankind, and to cast a tacit Reflection upon those laudable Arts and Endeavours whereby they are so incessantly taken up, in order to better their Condition in Society, and without which, indeed, Society itself could not well or long subsist.

It may therefore be question'd, whether Divines, out of their great Zeal for promoting the Interests of Religion, which, in Truth, if rightly conducted, cannot be too great, yet do not sometimes remonstrate against the Interests of this Life after a manner, which is not altogether natural or just. For when those who have taken great Pains in their lawful Vocations to enrich themselves, and rise still higher in the World, are afterward told, That the Things they so earnestly pursue, are mere empty insignificant Trifles, which contribute very little or nothing even to the Happiness of Men in this Life; and that those who possess them, are in a very dangerous, or perhaps dreadful Condition, with regard to a future Life: When Men, I say, hear these or the like Remonstrances against Riches, or rich Men; it will be very natural for them to draw one or more of these Conclusions from what is said; either that it is in vain for them

to take so much Pains for Things of so very little Use, and so very great Danger; or that the Maxims of Religion are contrary to those of civil and common Prudence; or else, that the Preacher is not so well acquainted, as he ought to be, with the Maxims of either, what may be said in favour of Poverty, or against Riches, where Men contend merely for a Prize of Eloquence, is another Case. For here the Business is not to inform the Judgment, but to use such specious Appearances of Reason or Truth, as may be most proper to Bribe and Corrupt it. But it is below the Dignity of Preachers to *declaim*; the Cause of Religion is too weighty to admit any little rhetorical Arts, and the Merits of it too clear and evident to need them. Besides, that when Divines, out of an indiscreet, tho' well-meant Zeal, advance any thing that is not reasonable, in order to promote Religion, there is nothing more apt to confirm Men in the unreasonable Prejudices they may have already entertained against it.

Divines ought indeed to speak of Poverty, tho' not as a State very desirable of itself, yet neither so disconsolate, but that there are a great many Reasons to comfort and support Men under the afflicting Circumstances of it. They ought, on the other hand, to Caution rich Men against the Temptations they are so much expos'd to, and to remind them of the strict Account they must one Day make of the Talents committed to their Trust. Particularly they are to be charg'd to lay up a good Foundation for themselves against that Day, by being rich in good Works, and exercising, on all proper Occasions, Acts of Mercy and Charity to the Poor.

Poor. But then to represent the Interests of this Life as contemptible, or in such a manner as may bring them into Disgrace, especially when those that do so, may themselves be observ'd to have any indirect Eye towards them; this is a ready Method to expose Religion to the derision of Men, who do not altogether want Reason.

Thirdly, But this leads me to conclude, in the last Place, with some Arguments that may be proper, under these three different States of Life, to teach us an intire submission to the Will of God.

1. There will be the greatest difficulty in persuading People to this Duty, who labour under very hard or mean Circumstances: For besides, that Poverty is continually diverting them from the Care of the Soul, by that of making necessary Provision for the Body; it is very apt to sink their Spirits, and render them more unfit for the nobler Exercises of Piety and Devotion. And this natural Tendency of it to make Men of a more abject and servile Temper, is very much heightned by the Indifference, not to say Contempt, wherewith they find themselves so generally treated; and that not only by Persons of vulgar Minds, who think there is no Homage due, except to the *God of this World*, but by those who have better Notions of Things, and should be much more sensible of what they owe to human Nature, in its greatest Adversity and Distress. We may add to this, that Poverty, especially where Persons have been expos'd from their Infancy to the Inconveniencies of it, is generally the Mother of Ignorance. For tho'

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all the Care is not always taken, that should be, to instruct young People, who have a more generous Education, in the Principles of Morality or Religion, and we sometimes find Men much at a Loss, when they come to explain themselves upon these Heads, whose Conversation notwithstanding is, in other respects, very Useful and Entertaining ; yet, generally speaking, I say, we observe the most gross and profound Ignorance, both as to the Principles and Duties of Religion, among the poorer Sort. Now when those who have less clear and distinct Notions of what they ought to believe, and do, are under more strong and frequent Temptations to a criminal Distrust of God, or to the Arts of relieving themselves by sinful and indirect Means, it must be granted, they will find so much the greater Difficulty in exercising themselves to have always a Conscience void of Offence towards God, and towards Man.

And this indeed is what *Agur* supposes, from the particular Reasons he gives for his deprecating a State of Poverty, *lest*, says he, *I be Poor, and Steal, and take the Name of my God in Vain* : That is, lest I be too violently tempted, in a profane manner, to question the Goodness, or repine at the Providence of God, or to seek Refuge in any fraudulent and irregular Practices, injurious to Men. For these Reasons, a State of Poverty, even upon a religious Account, and without regard to the temporal Disadvantages of it, cannot, in itself consider'd, appear very Happy or Desirable.

But shall People therefore, in low and poor Circumstances despond, or look upon their Condition as altogether Hopeless and Disconsolate ?

No :

No: This is a Consequence that should not by any means be admitted; and which, I shall particular endeavour to obviate. And, in the first Place, if Poverty, by engaging Men in the necessary Methods of procuring a Livelihood, take them off more frequently from the Duties of Piety, or occasion greater Distractions of Mind in the Performance of such Duties; if it cast such a heavy Weight upon their Spirits, that they cannot always raise them to the higher Flights of Reason and Contemplation; yet, let not poor People, on these Accounts, be discourag'd, or abandon themselves to Despair: God, who knows whereof they are made, will make gracious Allowance for the Temptations which more easily beset them, or for such Failures to which they are more subject, and through an Infirmary too, more common to the State, wherein his Providence has plac'd them. Besides, that there are Seasons wherein a poor and indigent Condition, instead of being an Impediment to the Devotions of Men, may rather tend to inflame them to a greater height: For when all visible Supports and human Means fail, where should we fly for Succour with so great Ardor and Alacrity, as to him, who is able, whenever he pleases, to supply our Wants, and certainly will do it, in such Measure and Proportion as he sees most convenient for us? And I do not doubt but that the Soul, upon pouring forth her pious Complaints in the Day of Distress, when she desires to take Sanctuary in the Divine Fulness, and panteth after the Fountain of all Good, *as the Hart after the Water-Brooks*: I do not doubt, I say, but that the Soul, in such fervent and devotional

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votional Applications to God, even when a Person may be under the most difficult and afflicting Circumstances of Life; yet is sometimes transported with a Joy, infinitely beyond what all the sensible Pomp and Pleasures of Life can afford.

Again: Neither ought Men to be too much affected with the Contempt or ill Usage, which Poverty sometimes exposes them to. For we are not to consider what is contemptible in the false and corrupt Judgments of Men, but what is really so in the Reason and Nature of Things. That Poverty, consider'd in it self, is not justly attended with any Idea of Infamy or Reproach, is evident from hence, That the best and greatest of Men, both in sacred and profane History, have, on certain Occasions, felt the Inconveniences of it. But because *Job*, when distress'd by it, complains that he was insulted, and holy *David*, under the like Circumstances, that he was forsaken by his Friends; shall we therefore conclude, that the Treatment they met with, was just and Reasonable? As irrational would it be to object, as the Jews did at the Time of our Lord's appearance, against the Truth of the Christian Religion, That he appear'd in Circumstances so Mean, and, as they apprehended, unsuitable to the Dignity of his Character. — *Is not this*, say they, *the Carpenter, the Son of Mary, the Brother of James and Joses, and of Juda and Simon; and are not his Sisters here with us?* Mark vj. 3. We have here indeed, the Prejudices which Men are apt to entertain, concerning Things from private and personal Considerations, very plainly represented. But how was the Truth of those extraordinary and miraculous

raculous Works which were done by our Saviour, in the least affected by his Working at a common and ordinary Trade? If it be true as *Tertullian* relates, that he did Work at it; or in what respects was his Doctrine less Heavenly or Divine, because his Alliances upon Earth, were not observ'd to be more Noble and Illustrious?

As the Disciple is not above his Master, Christians reduc'd to an indigent Condition must, in a corrupt World, sometimes expect to meet with undeserv'd Indignities. But this ought not to give them any great Pain, but rather afford them Matter of Joy and Consolation, since they are in a State, sanctify'd by the Choice which the Son of God himself made of it; and which has so many other excellent Precedents, not only to secure it from Contempt, but even to do it Credit and Honour.

Again: Where it has been the misfortune of poor People (a Case that too frequently happens) to have been neglected in their Education, and brought up in Ignorance; yet, they have this to support them under the Sense of it, that provided, according to the Measure of what they know, they are careful to maintain good Works; a good God will be gracious and favourable to them, and not expect to Reap where he has not Sown, or require any Returns of them, greater in proportion than their Receipts. For my own part, I cannot but think a Person less Knowing, who yet serves God in the simplicity of his Heart, and is truly penitent for his Sins, in a much happier State, than One who is able to talk very profoundly concerning the Nature and Attributes of God, but does not
serve

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serve him as God ; or who can define Repentance, and press the Duties of it after a most clear and judicious Manner, without finding in his own Heart any true or lively Motions towards it.

As to the two Sins in particular, which *Agur* supposes poor People under more peculiar and dangerous Temptations of falling into, they do not arise Necessarily, but only by Accident, from a State of Poverty. There are Persons in the World whom no Distress can separate from the Love of God, or provoke to charge his Providence foolishly, through any latent Principle of Infidelity : But who, on the other Hand, by holding fast their Integrity, and committing themselves in well-doing unto him, as unto a faithful Creator, have the opportunity of reaping a more visible and generous Triumph of their Faith. As there are others, who render their Probity the more Eminent and Conspicuous, by disdaining every thing that is Base or Unjust, and placing themselves in the last Exigencies, above the Power of Corruption. And certainly, in both these Instances, the greater distress People are under, the more noble Occasion they still have, of rendring themselves *accepted of God, and approv'd of Men.*

2. As to rich Men, it may be thought unnecessary to use any Arguments to persuade them to be satisfy'd with their Condition, and the favourable Dispositions of Providence towards them : And yet Contentment is not always a Vertue to be found among them. An insatiate Desire of Increasing, which is sometimes attended with most groundless and chimerical Fears

Fears of losing what they have, often renders them very uneasy, amidst all the Enjoyments, wherewith they appear to be surrounded; and betwixt the Ambition of accumulating Riches, and the Apprehensions they are under of being, by one Accident or other, depriv'd of them, they are apt to neglect the proper Occasions of making themselves rich in good Works, and even sometimes to practise very inhuman Acts of Violence and Oppression. But these are Returns to God's Providence, which equally argue an evil Heart of Unbelief in Men, and of the basest Ingratitude, for the Mercies they have receiv'd.

3. There are also very good Reasons why Men should most thankfully acquiesce in a moderate Fortune; which, if it do not afford them the greatest Opportunities of doing Good; yet is a happy and desirable State, and perhaps, in general, the most Safe and Innocent: For tho' it do not raise Men to any high Distinction in the World, it sets them however in a middle State between the most dangerous Temptations of it; and makes their Condition, at once, less Contemptible, and less Invidious.

4. But this one Reflection, that God appoints Men the three different States of Life, we have been considering, is proper to teach us all *indifferently*, the true Art of Contentment. For as the Knowledge of God perfectly comprehends whatever may be Good,
or

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or Convenient for us, so his Power can effect, and his Goodness will incline him to effect it. This is an unanswerable Argument to inforce the Apostle's Advice, *Let the Brother of low degree rejoice, in that he is exalted; but the rich, in that he is made low*, James i. 9, 10. Some indeed have thought, that the Grace of God itself, is nothing but such a happy and favourable Disposition of Events, in the Course of his Providence, as are most apt to work upon the different Tempers and Passions of Men. For Instance: A Person falls into Conversation where something is Occasionally said, that makes a very sensible Impression upon him: This Impression is afterwards augmented by his reading some good Book a Friend has put into his Hands, or which he has otherways accidentally met with; and then perhaps some sharp Affliction, which renders him still more Compos'd and Sedate, gives it all the Force and Influence, whereof it is capable.

This is a Notion very injurious to the Grace of God, which the Scriptures represent as the immediate Work of his holy Spirit upon the Minds of Men; and yet it must be granted, that these, or the like favourable Events of Providence, do very much tend to facilitate the Operations of Grace; and that in general, the State of Life, wherein Men are plac'd, has very great Power either towards making them more Pious, or more Corrupt.

Seeing therefore it is the Will of God, in all his Dispensations, that all Men should be
Sav'd;

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Sav'd; how can we conclude what has been said with a more just and useful Inference, than that the State of Life, which he has appointed us, if we will conform our selves to the Designs of his Providence, is really the most proper, and expedient for us, in order to promote our *Salvation*?

SER

SERMON XIV.

The Triumph of Faith over the Evils
and Adversities incident to us in
this Life.

I JOHN V. 4.

*This is the Victory, that overcometh the World,
even our Faith.*

BY the World, we are here to understand those Trials and Temptations of it which are incident to Men in every State and Condition of Life. The Principles of Temptation are within us, in the Corruption of our Nature, and the Bent of our sensual Passions and Inclinations ; which have chang'd that absolute and intire command the Soul had originally over the Body, into a certain Dependance upon the Body ; so that before we can free our selves from the Power of Temptation, arising from
this

this natural Depravity, we must *put off the Old Man* ; we must be *born again* ; for *whosoever is born of God, overcometh the World, and this is the Victory, &c. that overcometh the World, even our Faith.*

But in discoursing upon the Words, I shall not consider the Temptations of the World to Sin, that Efficacy of our holy Faith, whereby we are enabled to overcome them, under this general Notion ; but the Church, at the Time this Epistle was written, being in a persecuted and afflicted State ; and all Christians, at all Times, in one kind or other, or in one degree or other, being subject to Afflictions ; I shall more particularly consider the Power and Influence our Christian Faith has, or ought to have, upon us, with respect to Trials of this nature — *this is the Victory that overcometh the World*, That is, those Troubles and Difficulties, wherewith God is pleas'd to exercise good Men, in this World, *even our Faith* : And the efficacy of it appears from these four following Considerations, to which I shall at present confine my self, as it imports a firm Belief,

I. Of the Wisdom of God in all his providential Dispensations towards us.

II. Of his Goodness in them.

III. Of his Power to effect whatever his Wisdom or Goodness may design. And,

IV. And lastly, of his just Right and Dominion over us.

All these Considerations, 'tis true, are founded in natural Reason and Religion ; and the Philosophers have carry'd them as high as could

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be expected from unassisted Nature; but then *besides*, that reveal'd Religion carries them much higher, it enforces them upon us, by a Divine Authority.

First, Then in order to support us under the Troubles and Afflictions of this Life, or rather to raise us above them; let us consider the Wisdom of God, in all his providential Dispen-
sations.

When our Affairs lie in the Hands of Persons who are of known Ability and Experience, we promise our selves a good Account of them from their Management; and are less solicitous about any cross Accident or Difficulty that may happen; and yet the wisest of Men, could we be secure of their not deceiving us, may be deceiv'd themselves: A great many unexpected Casualties may start up in the way, which they could not foresee, and cannot prevent; and which may so puzzle and confound their Measures, that with all their Address and Dexterity, they cannot bring their Designs to bear.

And for this reason, tho' 'tis fit we should act always upon the most prudent Measures, yet we ought not to rely on our own Prudence; but refer the disposition of our Affairs to the wise Providence of God, according to that Precept of the wise Man, *Prov. iij. 5. Trust to the Lord with all thine Heart, and lean not unto thine own Understanding*; and when we have done this, we are patiently to wait, in God's due time, a happy Issue and Event of Things, tho' we meet with some Rubs and Disappointments in the way; as it follows in the next Verse, *In all thy Ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy Paths*, i. e. in the
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the Use of the wisest and fittest Means to the best Ends; conformably to what he says in another Place, *commit thy Ways unto the Lord, and he shall bring it to pass.*

For 'tis God alone that perfectly knows the Power and Progress of Second Causes, and the Effects they will produce: This the Heathens represented not ill, by tying the last Link of the Chain of Causes, to the Foot of *Jupiter's* Chain, from whence he could at once see to the End, and have an intire View of all the Parts of it. The Author of the Book of Wisdom, *ch. viij. 1.* makes use of a like *Image*, to give us a more lively and sensible Idea of God's Providence; *Wisdom* says he (which properly can only be understood of the Wisdom of God) *reacheth from one end to another mightily; and sweetly* (or in a beautiful, agreeable, and uniform Manner) *ordereth all Things*; whereas our Prospect of Things goes no further than the first Cause, and we are often too deceiv'd in judging of its immediate Effects.

This continu'd Train of Events, being known only to God, he often effects the Ends of his Providence, by means which appear in the Eye of human Reason unaccountable: He seems sometimes to *go about* in the execution of his Designs, as he did in leading the Children of *Israel* through the Wilderness, when there was a nearer and shorter Cut to the Promis'd-Land. But God himself has given us the Reasons why he suffer'd that People to wander so long *in the Wilderness*; namely, *That he might humble them, and that he might prove them, and from their Humiliation, and the Tryal of their Faith, take occasion to do them the greater Good, at their latter end,* Deut. viij. 16.

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At other times God makes use of Means, which seem directly to cross and oppose his Designs. Who would have imagin'd, that *Joseph* should have taken the first Steps to his Advancement above his Brethren, and to the highest Post in the Government of *Agypt*, from the Condition of a Slave? The various Turns of his Fortune and Means of his Rise, from the beginning of his Slavery in *Agypt*, were very intricate and surprizing; but God meant them all unto him *for Good*, and in the Event his Design is unravel'd, and the beautiful Scheme of his Conduct appears in a manner, worthy of him. I might observe the same wonderful and wise Dispositions of God's Providence, with respect to the Advancement of *Mordecai*, and the Deliverance of the Jewish People in his Time, by improving even the Designs of their Enemies against them to a quite contrary End, than what they were design'd to produce.

These things were written for our Instruction, and are left to us for Examples, that we, through Patience and Comfort of the holy Scriptures, might have *Hope*, that we should not despond, when the Circumstances of our Affairs appear most dark and melancholly, and there is the least human Probability of Success; but should look up to God, the wise Director and Disposer of all Events, who *to the Upright causeth the Light to arise out of Darkness*, by Means which they cannot see, or comprehend the Tendency of, and which are sometimes directly contrary to all Expectations founded on the Maxims of Worldly Wisdom and Policy.

For

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For the wisest of Men are often deceiv'd in the Choice of those Things which appear most desirable to them ; they see them in all their Advantages, and they magnify them ; but they do not see, or consider the long Train of Consequences which they draw after them, and which are often attended with great Misfortunes and Calamities: We should therefore refer all Events to the Wisdom of Divine Providence, and acquiesce in the Dispensations of it ; seeing God alone knows the Power and Connection of all Causes, and the Circumstances of every possible Event, and his Wisdom in the Order and Disposition of them, is equal to his Knowledge.

The Sum of all is, That while God careth for us, as he always does for good Men, we should in every Condition of Life, submit to his Wisdom, and acknowledge, That whatever he does, is best, and fittest to be done, especially if we consider in the

Second Place, the triumphant Attribute of his *Goodness*, which is over all his Works. For tho' the Providence of God, as we have shewn, wisely orders all Things, and always applies the fittest Means to produce the End he designs ; yet that which gives us the greatest Ease and Assurance of Mind, under all Events, is that glorious and essential Attribute ; whereby he is inclin'd to procure and promote the Happiness of his Creatures. 'Twas the *Goodness* of God, that first mov'd him to create the World, and to communicate that Happiness to his Creatures, which he could not increase to himself, and the same *Goodness* still presides over all the Acts of

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his Providence. *He is good, and does good*; All his Actions bear the Character of his Attributes, and above all his Attributes, he seems in the Holy Scriptures, to exalt that of his Goodness. So that, were it not reveal'd to us, yet 'tis a Maxim that flows from the Necessity of the Divine Nature, that *God does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the Children of Men*; but that in all the severest Dispensations of his Providence, he has very good and gracious Ends.

This is the great Foundation of our Hope and Trust in him, and indeed of all religious Worship; probably the first occasion of Idolatry was taken from the Benefits, which Mankind receiv'd, from the Influence of the Sun, Moon and Stars; and tho' their Worship was directed to a wrong Object, and generally very Superstitious as to the Rites and Manner of it; yet it shows however, how prone Men naturally would be to reverence and adore the true God, if they were thoroughly convinc'd, and did but seriously reflect upon it, that he is the original Fountain of all Goodness; and that all the Power his Creatures have to do us good, is deriv'd from him. 'Tis he, *who maketh the Sun to shine, and appointeth the Moon her Seasons*; 'Tis he, who regulates *the Stars in their Courses*, and directs their Influences to what Ends and Purposes he pleases. 'Tis he, who opens the Doors of Heaven, *and sends the former, and the later Rain upon the Earth*. In a word, those heavenly Bodies, which we look up to with so much Admiration, and which are so beneficial to the World, are all under the Direction of that wise and good God, who made them, and all the Blessings, we enjoy by their Influence, are to be ascrib'd

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ascrib'd to his Goodness, and refer'd to his Glory ; so says the *Psalmist*, *The Heavens declare the Glory of God, and the Firmament sheweth his handy Works*. If from Heaven we turn our Eyes upon the Earth, we there too every where see the Effects of the Divine Goodness ; in the Creation of a great Number of Animals, and a suitable Provision and Entertainment for all their natural Appetites ; and these Animals again, to say nothing of the other Beauties, and Conveniences of Nature, are all design'd for the Use and Service of Man : So that nothing is more contrary even to the natural State and Order of Things in the World, than to imagine, that God should have any Design in the Dispensations of his Providence, but what tends to the good of his faithful Servants. Some have thought, that the very Name of God in our Language, is deriv'd from this Attribute of *Goodness*. Whether it be so or not, this is certain, that the Idea of Goodness is essential to our Notion of God, and inseparable from it.

What shall we then think of those, who assert, that God by right of his absolute Power has condemn'd the far greatest Part of *his* Creatures to eternal Flames ? Or which comes much to the same thing, that he has not afforded them proper and sufficient Means, in order to escape Damnation ? I barely mention this Notion, because in Times of great Tryals, Men are under the strongest Temptations to anxious and distrustful Thoughts of God, to imagine that they have no Interest in him, and that his Promises belong not to them ; and that, if by some secret Decree he have excluded the generality of Men, from all possibility of being sav'd,

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they *may* be of that Number. When the Mind, I say, is disturb'd by any extraordinary or signal Calamity, Melancholy, especially in Persons that are any ways tinctur'd with such Principles, is apt to draw these black and dismal Clouds upon it, and fill it with desponding Thoughts. But the Consideration of the Divine Goodness, is sufficient to dispel such Thoughts; and did not our Reasonings concerning this Divine Attribute convince us, that our very Sufferings, if we do not make an ill Use of them, are design'd for our Good, yet the Scriptures every where confirm this Truth to us. The Words of the Apostle, *Rom. 8. 28.* are very full and significant to this Purpose. *We know*, says he, he speaks with an Assurance that excludes all doubt and uncertainty, *that all Things work together for Good, to them that love God*, i. e. God has wise and good Reasons, tho' perhaps unknown to us, in the severest Dispensations of his Providence, and which in the winding up of Matters, we may be able to discover our selves. 'Tis sufficient at present, if we know in general, that the Severities, God exercises over us are, design'd for the Tryal of our Faith and Christian Graces; and are so far from being an Argument that we are forsaken by God, or in a reprobate State; that they are the proper Signs of our Adoption, and God's paternal Love to us; *For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth, even as a Father the Son, in whom he delighteth.*

Say then in all Times of Adversity or Affliction; *it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good: The Lord! who of very Faithfulness causes us to be troubled, Psal. cxix 70. And all whose*
Ways

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Ways are Mercy, and Truth to such as keep his Covenant, and his Testimonies.

Thirdly, For the farther Confirmation of our Faith, let us consider the Power of God to effect whatever his Wisdom or Goodness may design; in this World, our Friends, who have our Interests most at Heart, and are very wise in contriving for our Advantage, and active in pursuing it, yet many times meet with unexpected Accidents in the way, which they cannot surmount. 'Tis God alone that is able to do whatever he pleaseth, and who is always a ready Help in time of need, to those that please him. All the Springs of Motion are in his Hand; both in Heaven and in Earth, and in the Sea, and in all deep Places, Psal. cxxxvi. 1. and therefore his Power is represented to us, not only by such Metaphors as are apt to create in us an awful Fear of offending him; whereby he is describ'd, with a stretched-out Arm, Exod. vi. 6. and as a Man of War, Exod. xv. 5. or as a consuming Fire, Heb. xij. 29. but he is also describ'd to us under such Allusions, as are proper to excite our entire Dependance on him for Relief and Support in the greatest Straits and Exigencies: As that he is a Rock of Salvation, Deut. xxxij. 15. and a strong hold in the Day of Trouble, Nahum i. 7. and Psal. ix. 9. a Refuge for the Oppressed, a Refuge in time of Trouble. Accordingly the Power of God is urg'd, as the great Motive to Faith and Confidence in him in Times of Adversity, and under the most sensible Calamities. *He healeth the broken in Heart, and bindeth up their Wounds; he telleth the number of the Stars, great is our God, and of great Power, Psal. cxlvij. 2, 3.*

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To convince us more effectually that all Power is deriv'd from God, and that we ought wholly to rely on him for Success in all Cases: He often frustrates the best form'd Schemes and Undertakings of Men, so that *they are not able to perform*; and at other times effects great Ends, by very weak, and in all appearance, improbable Means. So that as the Wise Man long since observ'd, *The Race is not always to the Swift, nor the Battel to the Strong*. These remarkable Interpositions of Divine Providence, are so necessary to humble the Pride and Vanity of Men, that did Success always answer to the Power and Probability of second Causes, they would be apt to forget God, and bear themselves high upon it, and to say in their Hearts, *the Power, and the might of our Hands have gotten us this*.

At other times God to make his Power known, and the Effects of it more Conspicuous and Memorable, does not interpose in the Deliverance of good Men, till they are brought to the last Extremities; and then, if in his Wisdom and Goodness, he thinks fit, he certainly *will* interpose; and if he will do it, nothing can oppose his Action; it was this that supported *David* in the greatest Dangers, and most pressing Necessities; *though I walk thro' the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no Evil*, Psal. xxiiij. 4, 5. And again, Psal. xxxiiij. 18, 19. *Behold the Eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, to deliver their Soul from Death, and to feed them in the Time of Famine*.

And this Consideration should teach all good Christians, even when all Human Supports fail, and there is no visible Prospect of Deliverance; not to faint when they are rebuked of him, but still

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still to trust in the Name of the Lord, or as the Prophet very elegantly expresses it, *to stay upon their God.*

God therefore, tho' our own Reason cannot by searching find them out, may still have secret Reserves of a good Providence towards us, some unthought-of Reward, treasur'd up for us, against the Day of Necessity; 'twas upon this Prospect, I say, when there was no other left, that the Prophet expressed his Reliance on the Power and Goodness of God in so noble and sublime a manner, *Altho' the Figtree shall not blossom, neither shall Fruit be in the Vines, the Labour of the Olives shall fail, and the Field shall yield no Increase, yet I will rejoyce in the Lord, I will Joy in the God of my Salvation; The Lord is my Strength, Hab. iij. 17, 18, 19.*

I proceed in the Fourth and Last Place to consider God's just Right and Dominion over us; and that both with respect to us as we are Men, and as we are Sinners.

As we are Men, God is the absolute Proprietor of our Persons, and of all that we have, and he may do with his own as he pleases, *what have we that we have not receiv'd from him?* Not by way of transferring his Right, but in Trust, and with a reserv'd Power to him of Resumption; this made Holy Job to acquit the Justice of God, in depriving him of his large and rich Possessions, *the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the Name of the Lord.*

God is the *absolute* Sovereign of the World; *his Dominion ruleth over all;* 'tis not our Business to dispute, but to obey his Orders; he appoints us our Stations, shews us what Part we are to act upon the Stage of *Life*, what we have
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to do, is to maintain our Character, and behave our selves as suitably to it, as we can. By virtue of this absolute Authority, *God killeth, and maketh alive, he bringeth down to the Grave, and bringeth up; he maketh Poor and maketh Rich, he bringeth low and lifteth up,* 1 Sam. ij. 7, 8.

God is the wise Sovereign of the World; *The Lord is a God of Knowledge; his Work is perfect, and all his ways are Judgment,* Deut. xxxij. 4. As there is a Necessity, considering the present State of Things in the World, for the different Ranks and Conditions of Men, so God has not only an inalienable Right to put them in what Circumstances he pleases, but is the fittest Judge of their several Capacities for the Business they are to manage, in order to serve the Ends of his Providence. We are here in a State of Warfare, 'tis not our Part to chuse our Posts, says *Epictetus*, under our great Commander, but to behave our selves well in them we cannot all be Generals or Officers; there is a Necessity that some should work in the Trenches, be upon the Watch, or do the other Duties of common Soldiers.

And this Sovereignty of God over Mankind, the Scriptures expressly found in his Right of Creation. *Thou art the God* (says *Hezekiah*) *thou alone of all the Kingdoms of the Earth, thou hast made Heaven and Earth.* And *Psal. xcvi. 45.* *Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, to be fear'd above all Gods;* and the Reason of his Greatness and Dominion over Men, and over all other Gods, follows in the next Words; *For all the Gods of the Nations are Idols, but the Lord made the Heavens.* And upon this Account the sole Power of disposing of Riches and Honour
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of Might and Strength is ascrib'd to him, 1 Chron. xxix. 11, 12. Not that God by Right of his Creation inflicts Punishments upon Men, exceeding the Benefits of it, or has decreed their eternal Damnation, without any respect to their Sins or Demerits. This is altogether inconsistent with our Notions of his *Goodness*; and it had been good indeed for such Men, if they had never been born. But what the Scriptures design by these Expressions is, that God may inflict such temporal Evils and Calamities upon Men, as may best serve the Ends of his Providence, in a way suitable to his Design of creating them, and to the Methods of his Justice: And therefore let us consider,

2dly, God's just Right and Authority over us, as *we are Sinners*. The best of Men when they narrowly search into their own Hearts, whatever their Sufferings be, will find Reason to acquit the Justice of God in them; and not only so, but to confess, that he punishes them less than their Iniquities deserve, and in his Wrath thinks upon Mercy. This even a Sense of natural Religion taught *Pharoah*; and therefore he prays, that God would not, as in Justice he might have done, continue the Judgment that was then upon him. *I have sinned, says he, the Lord is Righteous, and I and my People are Wicked. Intreat the Lord, that there be no more mighty Thundrings and Hail,* Exod. ix. 27, 28.

But the Character that is given Holy *Job* of his being a perfect and upright Man, one that feared God, and eschewed Evil, renders his Humiliation under the afflicting Hand of God, still more useful and instructive. *How should a Man,* says he, Chap. ix. 2, 3. *be just with God; if he will*

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contend with him, he cannot answer him one of a thousand; and ver. xx. If I justify my self, mine own Mouth will condemn me. Now if this Holy Man, tho' he could not be charg'd by others, or charge himself with any great or heinous Crimes, acknowledg'd the Justice of God's Providence in so pious a manner, when it seem'd to vex him with all its Storms; how much more ought a Sinner, in Times of Affliction, whose Conscience perhaps challenges him with many great and crying Sins, humble himself under the mighty Hand of God; and say with this holy Man in another Place; *I have sinned, what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of Men?* Job vij. 20. I have sinned, and the Hand of God is upon me, for my Sins, but still he preserves me: Still there is a Prospect for me, perhaps here, but certainly (if I live in his true Faith and Fear) hereafter, of a happy Deliverance; I complain of the Troubles and Miseries of Life, but what if the just God, as he might have done, had cut me off in the Career of my Sins, and plung'd me into the Flames of Hell, with a fresh and flaming Guilt upon me? Yet I still live, the Conditions of Grace and Mercy are still tender'd to me; I am invited, I am importun'd to accept them, I am assisted by the Spirit of God to perform them; (*What shall I do*) unto thee, O thou preserver of Men? *it is the Lord's Mercy I am not consumed*; why then should a living Man complain, a Man for the Punishment of his Sins? Lam. iij. 22, 39.

The several Branches of this Discourse carry their own Use and Instruction along with them; and what has been said, may, I hope, by the Blessing of God, have the design'd Effect upon those,

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those, who labour under any unhappy Circumstances of Life in any kind, by teaching them to make the All-wise, and good and powerful God the Object of their Faith and Trust; and also to believe he is Just and Righteous in all his Ways, and will lay upon Men no more *than is right*, Job xxxiv. 23.

And if we live under a lively Sense and Conviction of these Truths, tho' God in his Wisdom should think fit still to continue our Afflictions upon us, yet let not this weaken or discourage our *Faith*; if we at last gain Heaven, and attain the End of our Faith, even *the Salvation of our Souls*, I am sure we shall have no reason to complain, whatever Difficulties or Tryals we are expos'd to by the way; till that blessed time come, let us animate and support our selves with the Hopes of it, and instead of being weary and faint in our Minds, under the light Afflictions of this World, which are but for a moment: Let us rather rejoyce, that if we make a right Use of them, they will work for us, *a more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory*.

SERMON XV.

The Infatuation of Sin, 'till it terminate at last in the Obduracy of the Sinner.

HEB. iiij. 13.

— *Lest any of you be hardened, through the Deceitfulness of Sin.*

MOST Men are apprehensive of the Folly and Danger of Sin; and while they consider it under *that* Notion, think themselves, in some Measure at least, concern'd to avoid it. In order therefore to stifle those Impressions of Fear or Shame, to which their Minds are so naturally sensible, when they are going to commit any sinful Action, they have ordinarily recourse to one or more of the following delusory Arts; either they endeavour to represent the Sin they
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are under the Temptation of, after such a fallacious manner, that it may not *appear* Sinful; or to persuade themselves that the Circumstances which attend it, very much contribute to lessen its Guilt and Malignity; or else that they are such, which a good and merciful God, who knows whereof they are made, will make very favourable Allowances to: Or lastly, if they can find no relief to their Minds in any of these flattering Insinuations, then they take the only refuge left them in the deceitful Hopes of an after Repentance.

These are four of the great and most general Artifices of Sin, whereby Men suffer themselves to be deceiv'd or betray'd into a Compliance with it; till at length, perhaps, they grow obdurate, and Sin presumptuously, or without remorse. My Business therefore, in discoursing upon the Words shall be,

First, To consider and expose the deceitfulness of Sin in the several respects here mention'd; and

Secondly, To caution you more particularly, against these insnaring Artifices of it, from a consideration of the Danger, lest at any time you should, in the Event, be *hardned* by it.

First, When Men are tempted to commit any Sin, it is ordinary with them to dress it up, as far as they are able, in such a Disguise, that it may not appear *sinful*. And indeed, when we consider how much, in other Cases, our Inclination governs our Judgment and Belief, there is nothing extraordinary in what is here observ'd. How easily, even in things of a more

indifferent Nature, are we induc'd to Credit, what we wish to be True; and for no other Reason, but because we wish it. But in Cases where our Passions or Interests are more immediately concern'd, it is extremely difficult not to consult them; and that, with respect to our Opinion, both concerning Persons and Things: How credulous, for instance, are we upon the Subject of News, or any fugitive Reports, wherein the Party we espouse may find their Advantage? How averse, on the other Hand, to submit to the most evident Principles, or to acknowledge the Truth of the best attested Facts, when they do not comport with our particular Schemes or Expectations?

We may extend this Observation concerning the wrong Judgments Men are apt to make, on account of their different Views or Desires, so far as to discover, why Histories are generally so very partial and corrupt; and that we are rather to seek in them the private Regards of great Men, in whose favour, and by whose direction they are compos'd, than their true Character, or a faithful representation of publick Events. I speak here of modern Histories, and not of those which treat of Matters very remote, and such as have little or no relation to the State of Affairs, at the Time of writing them; and wherein we may therefore hope to find Things more justly describ'd: For Men naturally are not very much inclin'd to oppose Truth, where they are not, in one respect or other, oppos'd by it. But as to Histories, of what denomination soever, which are compil'd with a particular View of serving a Cause, or any Sett of Men that may have distinguish'd them-

themselves at the Head of it, deceitful as common Fame and oral Tradition are, it were perhaps, much better to make a Judgment from the Reports of them, than from such Records, whether relating to Ecclesiastical or Civil Affairs: For what Credit can be given to a Writer, whose principal Design is to shew his Ingenuity in stifling, or where that is impracticable, in corrupting the Truth after such a manner, that it may even serve to promote the Cause of Error? And who, on occasion, assumes to himself a Power of creating or annihilating Facts, but is always careful to represent them in such a View, as may be most agreeable to those whom he Writes at, or to whose Party he Sacrifices?

I only mention this as an Illustration of the Power which our Affections have over our Understanding; and to shew, that if in Things which only concern us at a distance, and in common, we are so apt to make wrong and partial Judgments, we shall still be in much greater Danger of making them, when any sinful Passion is violently excited in us, and especially if we have at hand the Means of gratifying it.

For tho' the Passions are design'd for many excellent Ends, as they put the Soul in a more brisk Motion, and make it operate with greater Force; yet when they grow Heady and Tumultuous, they fill the Mind with such confus'd Ideas, that we find our selves at once much less capable of discerning the pure Light of Truth, and of attending to it. In this disorder, I say, the Soul not perceiving distinctly, the Evidence of those Reasons which ought to determin her

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Choice, or being less willing to be determin'd by them, the more easily inclines to take part with the Passions, and yield to them with Pleasure, than to oppose them any longer with Reluctance and Pain.

But to discover to us how much the sinful Inclinations of Men are apt to blind and infatuate their Understanding, we need only consult the holy Scriptures. It being so usual in them to express a State of Sin by the Metaphor of Blindness, or that of Darknes; and reciprocally to attribute the Impiety of Sinners to their Ignorance, and their Ignorance to their Impiety: So that, *seeing, they see, and do not perceive, and hearing they hear, and cannot understand.*

But it may not be improper, for the better Illustration of what I am observing, to instance in some few Particulars, wherein the Passions have so great and visible a Power towards corrupting the Understanding, that they even over-rule it to give Judgment in favour of their Disorders. Thus the covetous Wretch endeavours to cover his Inhumanity, his Violence and Rapine, with the specious Pretence of Frugality, of asserting his Right, and providing for a comfortable and decent Subsistence in the World. And because nothing passes into his Mind, but what goes first through his Hands, it is a very difficult thing to put a *Thought* into him, but what is convey'd that way; or to convince him of his Error, by any Arguments that may be drawn either from Reason or Scripture; the God of this World having so blinded his Eyes that he *cannot*, or corrupted his Heart to such a degree, that will not see the Force and Propriety of them.

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The Extravagant, on the other hand, justifies his Excesses by the plausible Names of Liberality, of greatness of Mind, or good Nature; and if any Pretence could justify an irregular Conduct, the appearance of these bright and generous Qualities, might be allow'd to put in the fairest Plea towards it.

The ambitious Man again, thinks his Conduct, without examining too strictly the Justness of it, not only Innocent but Laudable; as he proposes, or at least fancies himself to propose, no other End by indulging to this Passion, but that he may render himself more Considerable, and by that means more Benificent and Useful in the World.

I might observe, concerning all the other Passions, how artful they are in justifying themselves, either by assuming the Name of those Vertues to which they have some distant Resemblance; or however, by designing some good, and, as they apprehend them, useful Ends, in their own Gratification.

We are not prompted, by our vitious Inclinations, to form these irregular Judgments, only in order to justify our Behaviour to the World; tho' 'tis certain, the Consideration of what the World will Think or Say of us, is what the best of us are very much influenc'd by; but we have still this further View, in calling *Evil, Good*, and giving Vice the Appearance of Vertue, that we may more easily stifle the Rebukes of Conscience; that we may Sin with greater Freedom and Security; and, that the less Check or Interruption may be given to our Criminal Pleasures: For we naturally, we invincibly love Pleasure, and would be always pleas'd.

But now 'tis impossible, while we consider any Action as absolutely unlawful, that we should take so much Complacency or Satisfaction in it, as when we are able, by what Artifices soever, to persuade our selves that we are at liberty to do it, without giving any great Scandal to the World, or Offence to *Almighty God*.

As our criminal Passions therefore, always design Pleasure, and Pleasure is what we always love; the Mind towards justifying the Disorders of them, and freeing itself from the painful Reflections of an evil Conscience, instead of clear Evidence, concerning the lawfulness of Indulging them, which cannot be had; the Mind, I say, is willing to take up with such Appearances of it, as may present themselves with any Colour of Probability.

A Gift, says *Moses*, in the Name of God, *does blind the Eyes of the Wise, and pervert the Words of the Righteous*, Deut. xvj. 18. But what Offer can be made more grateful to the Soul, or which has a greater Power of Bribing it, than that which tends to gratify its predominant Passion, the Passion wherewith it is continually and irresistibly possess'd, The Love of Pleasure? And Love, of all other Passions, is most apt to *blind* the Understanding, but has never more force towards *perverting* it, than when it has present Delight and Satisfaction for its Object.

It may not be improper to observe here, that the deceitfulness of Sin, in putting out the false Colours and Appearances of Vertue, discovers it self no where more, than among those, from whom, one would think, it should least
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be expected; your Men of Wit. For tho' Wit is a Talent, in many respects, Advantageous and Ornamental, yet we may reasonably doubt, whether it be not dangerous in more. The greatest Errors, and the most curious refin'd Arts of Sinning, have ow'd their Origin and Improvement to it. It has been thought that the Stage, where this admir'd Quality is chiefly ambitious of displaying itself, and which some have taken for the Seat of its Empire, has, in a certain Christian Nation, contributed very much to corrupt the Morals of it, if not more, than any other visible or known Cause of Corruption whatever. And tho' the just Remonstrances which have, from time to time, been made against the Disorders of the Stage, have, in some measure, tended to reform them; yet it may be question'd, whether, in some Points, a further Regulation be not necessary; and if Vice is not sometimes still set off with an undue Lustre, or made to Sparkle too bright in a counterfeit Imitation and Resemblance of Vertue? Whether, on the other hand, a strict and solid Vertue be not now and then represented, as having something Singular, Affected, and Visionary in it; or after such a ludicrous manner, that they who want Force of Mind, and judge concerning Things, not from the intrinsic Reasons, but those fictitious Images of them, wherewith they are surpriz'd and pleas'd, are not in great danger of entertaining, in many Cases, very slight and precarious Notions of Morality, or at least of concluding, that in the Eye of the World, there is no great Necessity of a nice and scrupulous Conduct? But,

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Secondly, When Men cannot disguise Vice, as in Offences of a more flagrant Nature, it is impossible for them to do, in such a manner, as to give it the Name and Appearance of Vertue, then the *Deceitfulness of Sin*, appears, in excusing what they are not otherwise able to justify or approve. Every Man may be convinc'd of this by his own Experience, and in a thousand Instances. But there is one Proof of it, wherein we are very nearly concern'd, and that is from the original Offence of our first Parents. The Woman, in particular, seems to have fram'd Four of the best Reasons, in Excuse of her Disobedience, that the most ready and refin'd Wit could have invented: For in the first Place, the forbidden Fruit appear'd to her, *good for Food*; but nothing can be Good or Useful to any End, further than it may be fit or proper to be us'd. *It was pleasant to the Eyes*; and why, as she probably argu'd, are our Senses given us but to inform us what sensible Objects are agreeable or ungrateful to us, that we may determin our Choice or Refusal of them accordingly? Or can it be suppos'd, that a wise and good God should give us Appetites, with an Intention of denying them the Pleasure of tasting their proper Objects? But she still rises higher in her Plea for eating of the forbidden Fruit, and from the Reasonableness of gratifying the sensible Appetite, proceeds to that of Feasting the Intellectuals: *It was a Tree to be desir'd, to make one Wise*. And what is more justifiable, than to endeavour after the Perfection of our Nature; or what tends more to the Perfection of it, than Wisdom? Through these deceitful Arguments, but too ingeniously contriv'd, in favour of her
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criminal Desires, she found her self at last betray'd; yet, lest they should not be admitted by God, as any reasonable Defence of what she had done, she seeks further to excuse her Guilt, by charging the more immediate occasion of it on the Tempter's Subtilty; *The Serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.* And considering, indeed, it was very Surprizing and Extraordinary, that a *Reptile*, naturally Mute, should speak to her in a human and articulate Language; she seems to have been not altogether without Reason, in laying the Blame of her Miscarriage upon his most deluding and specious Suggestions. Never perhaps, were so many Excuses, on any Occasion, so artfully laid together, or in so few Words; except perhaps in those of *Adam*, whereby he endeavours to extenuate his own Fault, by ascribing it to the Power which the First and most Perfect of her Kind, had over him: *The Woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the Tree, and I did eat.*

We are still very much inclin'd, in all our Offences against God, after the Example of the first Offenders, to make the most favourable Pretences we can in mitigation of them. For so great indeed is the Force of natural Conscience, that in order to stifle, in some measure at least, the Rebukes of it, the most wicked and profligate Sinners are compel'd to have recourse to this Method. And that either by considering the Sin they are guilty of, as less offensive and provoking in its own Nature, or as being attended with Circumstances that lessen the innate Guilt and Malignity of it.

And yet it must be granted, that there is a very great difference between Sin and Sin. The
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Maxim of the Stoicks, that all Sins are equal, is to be look'd upon as one of those extravagant and high-flying Principles, which they thought themselves more concern'd to maintain, in order to keep up the Pomp and Vanity of their Sect, than from any firm or real Conviction of its Truth.

But tho' all Sins are not equal, every Sin is an Offence against God, and contrary to Order; and which therefore no Consideration, however it may be suppos'd in comparison to lessen, can wholly or absolutely acquit us from the Guilt of: For *he that offendeth in one Point*, as the Apostle argues, *is guilty of all*; not that by committing one Sin, he is equally and particularly chargeable with the Guilt of all other Sins; this would be a very hard Saying: But the Meaning is, that he offends against the Authority which gave the same Sanction to the several Parts of the Law; and against that immutable Order, which he is indispensibly oblig'd, and in every Article of it to follow.

And yet there is reason to fear, that even Persons of a more strict and regular Life, when they are violently tempted to a Sin, wherein they apprehend less Guilt or Danger, are sometimes secretly inclin'd to desire, that God would only pardon them *in this Thing*; or to express themselves in relation to such a Sin, after the manner of *Lot*, when he came within View of the City of *Zoar*, *Behold now it is near to flee unto, and it is a little One*; *Oh let me escape thither*; *is not a little One?* and *my Soul shall live*.

It is farther granted, that Circumstances very much alter the Quality of our Actions, and that
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there are Crimes of a more heinous Nature, abstractedly consider'd, which, from the Motives upon which they are committed, or the Manner of committing them, may receive fewer or more heightning Aggravations: So that it shall be *more tolerable*, at the Day of Judgment, for some Offenders, than for others in the same kind, according to the different degrees of Ignorance or Malice, of Inadvertency or Presumption, whereby they offend. But this is a Consideration which Sinners, who profess themselves Disciples of Christ, must be particularly careful how they take Refuge in. Sinners, I say, who are to be Judg'd by a Law, which expressly requires them to abstain from *all appearance of Evil*, to be *Harmless, and without Rebuke*, to have respect to all God's Commandments, and to adorn the Doctrine of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in *all Things*. Let us examin every Action of our Lives, by these Rules, and then let us see how far any Circumstances whatever, may be able, I do not say to justify, but to alleviate or excuse our sinful Actions in any kind.

Thirdly, Where Men can, upon no Pretence, either justify or excuse their own Conduct, then the deceitfulness of Sin puts them upon having recourse, for relief of their guilty Minds, wholly to the Mercy of God. By which they do not understand, that glorious Attribute of his Nature, which inclines him to pardon and save *penitent* Sinners, and is regulated by infinite Wisdom, Justice and Holiness, and the regards due to his Sovereign Power; but they mean an easy and compassionate Temper of Mind in that
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all-glorious Being, without Reason, and without Bounds.

God forbid any thing should be said in Diminution to that Perfection of his Nature, without which Sinners could take no Satisfaction in contemplating the other Perfections of it: But yet as it is necessary for us to have right Notions concerning the Divine Attributes, in order to form our own Principles and Conduct, Men cannot be caution'd too much against dangerous Errors concerning that of the Divine Mercy in particular; there being no Mistake of more dangerous Consequence to them, than in this Article, or wherein it is to be fear'd they are more generally mistaken.

When we say therefore God is merciful, we do not intend that he will indifferently save all Mankind, or when he comes to judge the World, make no distinction between wicked and good Men, in the Sentence he will then pass upon them. But by a merciful God, we understand at the same time, a holy, just and wise God, in whom all his Attributes shine eminently, and are intimately united without interfering with one another.

We readily acknowledge, and with all Thankfulness to God, that it is thro' his Mercy we are sav'd; and that the Terms of Salvation are so highly favourable and advantageous to us. And it is the Mercy of God in admitting Christians *in general* to the Benefit of those Terms which the Scriptures so highly celebrate, but they no where promise Mercy to any particular Persons, who *neglect so great Salvation*, or refuse to comply with the Means of it.

A Prince

A Prince publishes an Act of Grace to his rebellious Subjects, in order to plead the Benefit whereof, their Submission is requir'd to certain easy and reasonable Terms. All this is very consistent with the Character of a wise and good Prince. But should any Prince by a publick and authentick Instrument declare, that he is still resolv'd to pardon his Subjects, tho' they should refuse to lay down their Arms and persist in their Rebellion against him; what Idea could we have, either of his Wisdom, or indeed of his Goodness? Seeing he has so little Regard to the Honour of his Laws, or even to the real good of those very Persons he connives at, and encourages in the Breach of them. We cannot think any temporal Potentate would be guilty of so weak and unreasonable a *Lenity*: And yet this in effect is what every Sinner, who hopes for the Pardon of his Sins, while he continues impenitent in them, supposes the great and eternal God capable of.

Fourthly, When a Sinner is neither able to satisfy his own Mind *in that which he alloweth*, or the Circumstances of his Sin are such as will admit of no Alleviations; or in the next Place, when the Necessity of Holiness appears not only consistent with a Dispensation of Grace and Mercy, but absolutely necessary to entitle him to the Benefits of it; then his last Resort, to the End his guilty Conscience may in some Measure at least be kept in Peace, lies in the Hopes of his reconciling himself to God, and one Day clearing all Scores by an *After-Repentance*. But these Hopes are owing to the Deceitfulness of Sin, not only in a very dangerous Instance, but which

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which has the greatest Appearance in the World of a Contradiction in it.

For when a Man commits any Sin with a Design, or in Hopes of repenting of it, he designs at the very instant to be heartily sorry, that he has committed it, and tho' the same Circumstances of Temptation should again occur, never to commit it again. But if such a Design were really sincere and well founded, what imaginable Cause can be assign'd, why the Reason of it should not as much restrain him from the present, as from a future Compliance with Sin? No one certainly, but a Person infatuated with the Deceitfulness of Sin to the last Degree can have any tolerable Conception, how he shall hereafter, and upon Principles truly Religious, resolve to hate and abhor what the Force of his sinful Inclinations, at the very time carries him away upon, contrary to all the Motions of Divine Grace, and the Convictions of his own Reason.

Is it not much more natural to suppose that every sinful Compliance will still betray him into greater Disorders; and that the farther he walks in the *Sight of his Eyes, and the Ways of his Heart*; he will find it a Work of so much more Difficulty and Discouragement to enter upon the proper Methods of renewing himself again unto Repentance? He may, I grant, at the Time he is engag'd in a sinful Course of Life, propose, and that is all he seems capable of proposing, that he will afterwards perform some external Acts of Humiliation for his Sins. This he may do, while he continues wholly under the Power, or in the open and avow'd Practise of them. And in Truth this is no more, than
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what the greatest Sinners are observ'd to do every Day : They confess over and again, that they have done those Things, which they ought not to have done ; and their Confession is even attended with some visible Signs of Sorrow and Regret : This is a Sacrifice they can pay to God with their Lips, while their Hearts are far from him, or which perhaps is become so customary and habitual to them, that they have not so much as any *actual* Intention or Design in it.

But Repentance, where 'tis sincere, imports something more than a bare Confession of Sin, or even a sensible Concern under the Apprehensions of suffering for it. *Godly Sorrow*, saith the Apostle, that Sorrow which is founded on truly pious and good Principles, *worketh Repentance unto Salvation, not to be repented of*. Whoever therefore in the Motion, which his Grief for the Sins he has committed, excites, does sincerely resolve to repent, must resolve at the same time to comply with all the Means of Salvation, and in particular to hate and detest the Cause of his former Miscarriages. But we say, no Man can without an apparent Inconsistency resolve, that what is at present grateful and pleasant to him in the Action, shall at any time hereafter be odious and detestable to him in the *Reflection* ; especially, if he suppose, which one who truly designs to repent must do, that the same Circumstances of Temptation should again occur ; For there being something as he apprehends, peculiar and extraordinary in the Temptation, which at present, all Things consider'd, renders his Compliance with it more eligible.

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What Reason can be given why the very same Motives, upon which he now determines his Choice, will not hereafter have the same Force and Operation? In short, if the Power of a present Temptation to any Sin be a reasonable Argument for your yielding to it, it will hold as well, and we generally find it does so, against our grieving and afflicting our selves for having committed it.

The Deceitfulness of Sin in putting us upon the Delay of Repentance appears farther from the Uncertainty of that Time, wherein we project to set about the Work of it. For all future Time is in God's Disposal; and the more we have hitherto neglected the Opportunities of turning our selves to him, the less Reason have we to expect the Continuance of them. A thousand Accidents by his just Providence may hurry us suddenly out of the World; no Man having more certain Security against the Surprise, than Protection against the Power of Death. Neither Health, Youth, Strength, Riches or Honour, can give any of us an Exemption in either Respect; those, who upon a mistaken Notion of Christian Faith (if the Notion be not altogether singular) contend for such an Exemption, are only capable of excusing their Error, upon this poor Pretence, that they cannot *live* to see themselves confuted. But what if God, as by our former Abuse of that Goodness which should have led us to Repentance, we may justly provoke him to do; what if, I say, the just God should cut us off in our Sins, and require our Souls at a Time when we are least prepar'd to appear in Judgment before him?

How

How great Distress, and Confusion of Mind must we necessarily find our selves in upon so fatal a Surprize? But yet this is nothing to the dreadful Consequences of it in a State of unspeakable Misery, amidst all the Horrors of an endless, but fruitless Despair. In a word, what will all the former Hopes of a Repentance in Reversion signify to a Sinner, when he is past Hopes of having his Life protracted a Moment longer? Or when he has barely time to consider, that after a thousand ineffectual Designs of repenting for his Sins, he has never once put them heartily in Execution, but is now going out of the World in a sinful *impenitent* State?

And yet if we could be secure, which no Man can be, of a future Space for Repentance, what Assurance have we that our Hearts will then be in a better Disposition for it? Or that God, after we have so often and so long done Despight to his holy Spirit, will give us more Grace, than at present, to inspire us with true Contrition of Heart, or to facilitate the much greater Difficulties which will then obstruct it?

Let us but reflect how many times we have heretofore deceiv'd our selves with the vain fugitive Designs of repenting at a *more convenient Season*; and then let us answer it to our own Consciences, if we can, why we should trust any longer to such Designs, or still proceed in so notorious a manner to *abuse our own Delusion*? Certainly it becomes us much rather to fear, lest thro' the Deceitfulness of Sin, in so very common and repeated an Instance of it, we should at last grow obdurate, and more insensible to the Impressions both of natural Conscience and Divine Grace. But this leads me,

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2dly, In the next Place, and in few Words as possible, to caution you against the insnaring Artifices of Sin, from a Consideration of the Danger, lest at any time you should in the Event be *hardned* by it. For Hardness of Heart is the most dangerous State which Sin can bring Men under, or provoke the Divine Justice to inflict upon them, in this World. And therefore it is us'd in Scripture as one of the highest Expressions concerning the present Judgment of God against Sinners, and which removes them at the farthest distance from all Capacity of restoring themselves to his Favour.

But to represent to us more effectually the Danger of such a State, let us consider a little some of the most common and obvious Symptoms with which it is attended.

1. The first Instance, whereby Men ordinarily discover an Obduracy of Heart, is in their Sinning without any regard to Modesty, or a Sense of Shame; now Shame is one of the most powerful Restraints in Nature to our Criminal Inclinations, and of the most general Influence. In young or ignorant Persons, who are not so well capable of making use of their *Reason*, it often supplies the Place, and does the Duty of it. Nay, 'tis a Passion not only implanted deep in the Mind, but after a more visible and significant Manner in the very Frame of the Body: So that our Innocence, where Nature has not been much vitiated, is no sooner attack'd, but as a faithful Sentinel it reports the Danger, and even discovers to others, by the Air and Signatures of the Face, the Apprehensions which we are under. The wisest and best of us may possibly recollect, if we please, that the
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Preservation of our Honour and Vertue has, on certain Occasions, been more owing to the Power of Shame, than to all other Considerations whatever, civil or religious. Men will therefore naturally grow more bold and luxuriant in any Vice, as the Shame of it wears off, or they have been too familiar with it. But when they are wholly lost to all Sense of Modesty, which is the ordinary Case of obdurate Sinners, their Innocency is irrecoverably lost with it. We may therefore observe, that the Scriptures make it the Character of the most profligate and notorious Sinners, that *they refuse to be ashamed*; and *commit Abomination* without Blushing, or any visible signs of Confusion, *Jer. iij. 3. — viij. 12.*

2. The hardened Sinner is not only insensible to the Motions of Shame, which are so naturally excited upon the Commission of Sin, but he feels no Regret of Conscience from any other Principle whatever. He has no Regard to the Distinction of Good and Evil, of Right and Wrong; but consults only, how to gratify his Passions, without examining whether his Conduct be just and regular, or what Account he shall be able to give to God, to himself, or to the World of it; and when Men are once grown to such a pitch of Impiety, that they slight the Remonstrances of their own Reason, and Sin without either Fear or Remorse, what should withhold them from running into the most vile and scandalous Enormities? The Force of Conscience is great, and which very bad Men, in many Cases, are not wholly able to resist. But when any one by a long Habit of Sin has contracted such an In-

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sensibility of Heart, that it does not reproach him with his most flagrant Impieties, there are no human and ordinary Means left for his Recovery, or which may prevent him from filling up the Measure of his Iniquity. *When Wisdom cries, and Understanding puts forth her Voice,* he cannot hear. The most powerful Reproofs which he meets with in Books, in Conversation, or from hearing of Sermons, make no Impression on him, but are lost in the confus'd Noise of his ungovernable and rebellious Passions.

This short Representation I have made concerning *hardned* Offenders, who have sinn'd away the Regret of their own Minds, is very agreeable to the Manner wherein they are describ'd in Scripture. They are said to be given over to a *reprobate Mind*, and the Spirit of *Slumber*; to be past *feeling*; and to have their *Consciences* *fear'd*, as *with a hot Iron*, Rom. i. 28.—xi. 8. Ephes. iv. 19. 1 Tim. iv. 2.

3. Another sign of an obdurate Heart in Men, is, that it renders even the severest Judgments of God useless towards their Recovery and Amendment. And yet it is natural for very great Sinners, when the Hand of God is upon them, and *presseth them sore*, to humble themselves before him, and to form at least some good Resolutions of entering upon a more strict and religious Course of Life. But the *hardned* Sinners reject, with Disdain, the proper Admonitions of God's Providence to reclaim him; *wills none of his Reproof*; and like a sullen Child, improves the Chastisement which is intended to break him of his Faults, into an Occasion of discovering a more refractory and obstinate Temper. But I shall only cite the Words of the

the Prophet *Jeremiah* to shew, how highly provoking such a Temper is to God; and of what dangerous and terrible Consequence to Men; For thus he addresseth himself to that supreme and righteous Judge of all the Earth: *O Lord, are not thine Eyes upon the Truth? Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; Thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive Correction; They have made their Faces harder than a Rock; They have refused to return. Therefore I said, surely these are poor, they are foolish, for they know not the way of the Lord, nor the Judgment of their God, Jer. v. 3, 4.*

4. But the most dreadful Consideration of all to a hardned Sinner, is, that he has provok'd God to withdraw the present Aids of his holy Spirit from him; and that after he has so long resisted the ordinary Means of Grace, nothing but an extraordinary Degree of it, which he has no reason to expect, can possibly recover him. I do not deny but that God, by a special Grace preventing an obstinate Sinner, does sometimes put into his Heart good Desires, which may afterward be improv'd towards renewing him again unto Repentance, and working out his Salvation. But then, we say, the Method of God's dealing with such a Sinner is rather to be consider'd as a *Prerogative Act* of Mercy, which he may possibly indeed dispense, than a Privilege, to which the Sinner can lay a reasonable Claim, or flatter himself with any well-grounded Hopes of.

And if this, as we have represented it, be really the State of obdurate Sinners, can Men be too earnestly caution'd against the Danger and dreadful Consequences of it? To those

indeed, who think it not of any Importance to them, whether they shall be sav'd, or escape eternal Damnation, any farther Caution on this Head may appear altogether unnecessary. For without entring into the Question, whether God in Justice do sometimes so harden the Hearts of Sinners, that he finally withdraws his Grace from them in this World, and render them for ever-after incapable of it; tho' he should still grant them a longer Term of Life: As to which Point Divines are not universally agreed; but without coming, I say, to any Argument upon this Question, the Case of harden'd Sinners must be suppos'd at least dangerous to the last Degree, even by those, who do not look upon it as wholly *desperate*. And then, which of us for the whole World would be found, or even apprehend himself in such a Case? And yet there is no Man who allows himself in the known habitual Practise of any one Sin, that can certainly tell where he shall make a stand, or whether by Degrees he shall not be drawn on to commit still greater Impieties, till in the Event they occasion his *final* Obduracy. The only good Security we can have, that we shall not run into all manner of Sin, is to avoid every Sin; and how artfully soever it come disguis'd, according to the Apostle's Exhortation, wherewith I shall conclude, to *Abstain from all appearance of it*.

To the Right Honourable
William Bromley, Esq;
One of Her MAJESTY's Principal
Secretaries of State.

SIR,

IT is expected, that Great Names should be prefix'd to Great Works, and to them only. But Good Men, in eminent Stations, are sometimes pleas'd to dispence with the Common Forms of Greatness, and to favour well-intended, tho' less ample Occasions, of addressing them.

Those who would infer, from the great Number of excellent Discourses already publish'd on the Anniversary of our Royal Martyr, that there is no Necessity of augmenting them, may do well to consider, that fresh and flagrant Offences in any kind, against the State, call for more publick and repeated Animadversions.

While 'tis the constant Employment of so many servile Pens to traduce the best of Governments, and Persons of the greatest Authority, and first Distinction in it; While those Principles, upon which the Grand Rebellion was originally form'd, and afterwards fomented, are industriously propagated, and in the chief Places of Concourse; While ill Designs are

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Epistle Dedicatory.

openly promoted, and under the very Umbrage of an Appeal to the Clergy! Certainly 'tis incumbent on every Clergyman, to apply convenient Remedies, so far as they are applicable in his Sphere, to such Disorders; and to obviate the ill Consequences of them, by asserting the good Old Principles, upon which the Safety of Church and State has ever been best secur'd; and, after all the Chicane of pretending Empiricks in both, ever will be so.

And we seem under a particular Engagement to employ all proper Methods, which the Nature of our Office may supply, against the Efforts of Faction, as they are thought, how daring soever, yet too despicable to provoke the secular Arm. Tho' it may probably be from an Abuse of this Lenity, which the Men of Moderation, when in Power, were always Strangers to, that the Enemies of so excellent an Administration have the Effrontery, not only to publish their Scandals, but to do it after a Manner, and in Terms, wherein no Regard is had, I do not say to the Rules of Christianity, but to those of common Decency and Respect, in civil Life.

But it is our peculiar Advantage, to live under a Government, which no Charge can be brought against, but what Libertines, from the Observation of Solomon in my Text, have charg'd Providence it self with! **AN EXCESS OF CLEMENCY.**

How

Epistle Dedicatory.

How far the general Precepts of Christian Forbearance, are to be extended in favour of public and notorious Delinquents? What Measures should be observ'd by the Civil Powers, with respect to that Rule of being kind to the Unthankful, and to the Evil? How long those who despise Government, who are presumptuous and self-will'd, and not afraid to speak evil of Dignities, may be tolerated with Impunity? These, Sir, are Questions far above me, and much fitter to be resolv'd by a Person, equally vers'd in the Laws of the Christian and Civil Institution.

It has been indeed too common a Prejudice against our holy Religion, that a strict Regard to the Rules of it, is not always observ'd to accompany certain great Qualities, which sparkle in the Eye of the World, and are in themselves highly Valuable. This Prejudice, it must be own'd, has ever had some Foundation in Fact; And natural Reasons may be assign'd, why Gentlemen of extraordinary Talents, and especially of a lively and luxuriant Imagination, are not in all Respects the most susceptible of religious Impressions. This Objection may be otherways reply'd to; but we have sometimes the Happiness of seeing it confuted, and that is the most sensible way of confuting it, by living and illustrious Examples.

*I have here, Sir, a proper and very inviting Occasion of considering You, in Your Personal, in Your Domestic, and more public Capacity. Without Imputation of Flattery, against which I shall
always*

Epistle Dedicatory.

always desire to guard with the utmost Caution, it may be said, if You will pardon me for saying it, that in all the relative Duties of Life, the World has seen few brighter Instances of a regular and uniform Conduct. But I shall not attempt a Character so well known, and to which I know my self so much inferior.

I only beg leave to observe, that your growing Abilities early drew the Eyes of the learned University of Oxford upon You; and their repeated Choice of You to represent them, has been abundantly justify'd by Your representing them at all Times so well and faithfully, that You were thought the fittest Person to fill the Chair in the best House of Commons, and to serve the best of Queens, in one of the highest and most important Places of Trust.

It is, Sir, from Your being a Representative of that most famous and ancient Seat of Learning, that I am at present more particularly ambitious of Your Patronage; as it affords me an Opportunity, which may not be judg'd altogether improper, of paying my most humble, and public Acknowledgments, for the Diploma, I lately had the Honour of receiving from thence, and after the most honorary Manner.

I am, Sir,

Your most Obedient

most humble Servant,

R. Fiddes.

SERMON XVI.

On the Thirtieth of *January*, being
the Anniversary of the Martyrdom
of King CHARLES the First.

ECCLES. vij. 15.

There is a just Man that perisheth in his Righteousness, and there is a wicked Man that prolongeth his Life in his Wickedness.

THE Character *Solomon* here takes upon himself is that of a *Preacher*, and the principal Scope of his Discourse is to direct our Views forward upon another World, from a Consideration of the precarious and irregular State of Things in this. To which end certainly he could not have made use of a more proper or penetrating Argument, than what is contain'd in the Words now recited. For they mani-

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manifestly extend, what is so often observ'd, concerning the seeming Inequalities of Providence to Mankind here, as far as this Observation can be carry'd.

That wicked and good Men should indifferently share many of the Blessings and Evils of Life, has nothing surprizing in it, or which gives us any sensible Pain. Indeed, considering the different Views, Passions, and Interests of Men, it is impossible, without a continued Series of Miracles, that Things should be otherwise order'd; But that God, after having long *chastened* and *corrected* good Men, should at last *give them over* unto Death; that after an uninterrupted and high flow of Prosperity, he should sometimes permit Sinners, *impenitent* Sinners, to go down (in the Eye of the World) to the Grave, *in Peace*; may be thought of all his providential Dispensations, to have the greatest Appearance of Severity on the one Hand, and of Indulgence on the other. Because the *Issues of Life* being of the last Consideration and Importance, if any Argument of God's *Love* or *Hatred* to Men could be drawn from what befalls them here, there is nothing we can better form such an Argument upon than the *Circumstances* of their Death.

If this *Scripture* be so forcible of it self to give us an Idea of the mix'd and uncertain Condition of Things Temporal; the Idea must still be more powerfully impress'd from the sad Solemnity of a *Day*, wherein the Words are so remarkably fulfill'd in our Ears, and so very applicable, that I am perswaded every one present has already prevented me in the Application.

For

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For we have not now under Consideration the Misfortunes incident to good Men, and the flourishing State of wicked Men in common, or low Life; but we are contemplating the different Turns and Revolutions of Fortune in the highest and most eminent Stations.

If on one side of the Text, we see a just, but withal an excellent and sovereign Prince, for a long time expos'd to the greatest Indignities, Difficulties and Dangers, and at length betray'd into the Hands of wicked Men, and *perishing in his Righteousness*; we see, on the other side, *Folly set in great Dignity*, (Ch. x. 6.) and those very wicked Men, who had been his Betrayers and Murtherers, who had broke thro' all the Ties of Duty, Fidelity and Justice, and, in the End, of common *Humanity*; yet for a considerable Period attended with a smooth Run of Success, and reaping in Triumph the Spoils of their Treason; some of them to the concluding *Period of their Lives*, without any visible Denunciation of God's Displeasure against them.

I avoid, as much as possible, all Circumstances of Aggravation on either side of this dismal and *inverted* Scene of Things; my Design not being to irritate but to instruct; and to that End, do not know how to discourse upon the Words of my Text better, than in the following Order.

I. *First*, I shall endeavour to explain the Terms of it, and that with an Eye to the present Occasion.

II. *Secondly*, I shall consider with what Restriction it is to be understood.

III. *Thirdly*, I shall shew, that no Article of Impeachment, against the Divine Providence, can be drawn from it.

IV. In

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IV. In the *Fourth* and last Place, I shall make some useful and seasonable Improvements of what has been said.

I. *First*, I am to explain the Terms of my Text.

There is a just Man. Solomon does not here intend a Person absolutely perfect, or one who is able to answer to the full and strict Demands of Justice, for in that Sense *shall no Man living be justified*; but he intends one comparatively just, with regard (as Divines speak) to a Perfection of State, not of Degrees; one to whom, in the Discharge of his Duty, equitable Allowances are to be made from the present frail State of human Nature, and upon the Conditions of Repentance.

Tho' indeed, when we examin the Life of that excellent Prince, the crying and national Guilt of whose Death we are now met to deprecate; he appears to have gone much beyond the common and ordinary Characters of *just Men*. It may be question'd, without descending to Particulars, whether in the relative Duties of Life, and all the Branches of a strict Morality, the Christian World had seen a more bright and perfect Example, or which was not impair'd with greater and more frequent Escapes; yet he was not more exemplary in his Morals, than in the several Offices of Piety. As to the Devotional Part of it, the admirable Book he has left us is a sufficient Proof, had we no other; and it may be said, there are as great and sublime Strains of Devotion in it, as ever enter'd into the Heart of Man.

Yet, uniform as he was in his Practice, in reference both to a moral and religious Life, he had
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had Passions like other Men, and some too that are said to have been complexional. It was the more for his Honour, that they were attended with so very few, if any, irregular Consequences to himself or others. When the Letters, which had passed between him and the Queen were by a Baseness and Disingenuity we cannot think of without Indignation, not only open'd, but expos'd in the most publick manner; tho' innocent Expressions might very easily have been allow'd in them, capable of an indirect Interpretation, yet we do not find that Malice itself could gather any Expression from them, in Prejudice to the *Purity* of his Sentiments, and the exact *Decorum* great Personages ought always to observe, in whatever they say, or commit to Writing.

If we understand *Justice* in a more strict Sense, as it denotes in our Commerce with other Men a firm Adherence to the Rules of Fidelity and Honour, the *Noble Historian*, in his celebrated Character of King *Charles* the First, observes, " he was so great a Lover of Justice, that no
" Temptation could ever dispose him to a
" wrongful Action, except it came so disguis'd
" to him, that he believ'd it to be just.

If I may farther apply the Distinction *St. Paul* makes use of, between a righteous or just and a *good* Man, *Rom.* 5. 7. the Martyr of the Day was eminent in this superior Character. He was good to all about him, to all he employ'd, or that came recommended, with any Advantage to him; indeed too good to many of them; for his Goodness was sometimes abused to his Disservice. And we cannot, on a more proper Occasion, put up our Prayers to
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the Throne of Grace, That a Princess descended from him, who is all Goodness, and whose Reign God has so much delighted to honour, may never have her Favours abused by factious Persons, if any such are *permitted* to enjoy them, to dangerous or disloyal Ends.

But to turn our Thoughts from Apprehensions, which we are so willing to think unreasonable; our Royal Martyr, that good Prince, for whom many of his faithful Subjects did not only sacrifice all the Interests of Life, but, as they were in Duty bound, *even dar'd to die*, was by his rebellious Subjects, after a long Series of Trouble and Adversities, *himself* put to Death, and thereby gave the most signal Confirmation of what I am to explain in the next place.

There is a just Man that perisheth. By this Expression we are not only led to consider the unhappy manner of a just Man's Death, but the afflicting Circumstances of Life, which may for any considerable time precede it. Thus the Words deriving from the same Original, in the new Testament, do not barely denote a simple Act of Dissolution, but a permanent State of Misery. To perish in the former Sense, would indeed be very desirable to the damn'd; and since they have brought themselves to suffer the *Vengeance of eternal Fire*, they will have reason to wish they had never been born, or that, as in many respects they have liv'd, they had also dy'd like the *Beasts that Perish*. Poor Consolation to a Soul naturally immortal, and capable of immortal Happiness, so far to have abus'd its Reason and Liberty, as to render Annihilation it self a *reasonable Choice*!

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There is a just Man, that perisheth in his Righteousness; that is, a just Man is expos'd here to a long State of Suffering, sometimes to Death, tho' he still persevere in practising the strict Rules of Justice, in the full and general Extent of the Word; tho' he take up that noble and magnanimous Resolution. of Job, Ch. xxvii. 5. Till I die I will not remove my Integrity from me; my Righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my Heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.

But I suppose the Preacher rises still higher in this comprehensive Gradation, and designs farther than the Righteousness of a just Man is sometimes the visible and direct cause of his Sufferings; that is, he suffers as a righteous Man and for the very sake of Righteousness; or, because he is fully determined to act upon Principle, and to do his Duty, whatever Dangers or Inconveniencies a faithful discharge of it may betray him into.

Here again, the Example of our Royal Martyr appears with a bright and distinguishing Lustre; he did not only through the whole Course of his Sufferings hold fast his Integrity, and at last die the *Death* of the Righteous; but he died in a just and righteous Cause, and for it: He asserted, tho' that was the occasion of all his Sufferings, the primitive constitution of the Church, and just Rights of the Crown, to and at his last Moments; and would not suffer, so far as he was able to oppose it with the hazard of all that was dear to him in this World, a Breach to be made in the Fundamentals of either, as well foreseeing what afterwards happen'd, the Disorder and Confusion, with every evil Work that would enter in at such a Breach,

And there is a wicked Man. I still consider the Words with respect to Persons in a superior Condition of Life, and therefore by a wicked Man we are here to understand one in some eminent Post of Profit or Power, enabled by an abuse of these Advantages, to *strengthen* himself in his Wickedness, and to run a greater length towards filling up the Measure of it.

The Application turns no less visibly here on those who were at the Head of the Grand Rebellion. The Oppressions, the Violence, the Injustice, to speak in the softest Terms, which they run into, were not of an ordinary Pitch, tho' all executed in the Name of *Liberty* and *Property*, as we have known several Things tending the same way, under the specious, but no less equivocal, Name of Moderation; tho' there appears indeed this Agreement between the Spirit of ancient and modern Faction, that Popery has ever been the common Cry when there was the least Danger of it, and the Church when really in the greatest Danger, represented most Safe and Flourishing.

But why all these dismal Apprehensions in Men for the Church, who act upon the worst of Popish and Jesuitical Principles, and most destructive to the Rights of it? such as making the Prince, the Head of the Church, accountable to the People after as despotic a manner as the Jesuits do the Pope. Levelling the Authority of Episcopacy, rendring that of the Priesthood of little significance, but of no necessity; legitimating the Baptism of Lay-Men and Women (the same Reasons will legitimate their Administration of the other Sacrament) and promoting factious and schismatical Principles in order, by dividing us, to strengthen the popish Interest; for Popery can
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never come in among us, but at the Breaches made by our Intestine Divisions about Religion, and the Measures of Civil Obedience.

This is no new Character of Men, tho' somewhat perhaps refin'd upon, who yet profess some regard both for Monarchy and the Church; it was the Character originally of the Enemies to both, in the Reign of King *Charles* the First. But whose Success and Impunity for so long a time, have given too great and evident a Confirmation to what I am to explain in the next place.

There is a wicked Man that longeth his Life. For it is not barely hereby intended, that wicked Men are sometimes, for wise and just Reasons of Providence, suffer'd to live long, but that, in the Language of the *Psalmist*, they also see good Days and enjoy the Blessings of Life in great Splendor and Plenty. *Length of Days* is an Expression in Scripture which at once denotes a protracting the Period of Life, and all the Advantages of Health, Ease, and Freedom, from those Cares and Anxieties, which by a natural Casualty, tend to impair or shorten Life: Tho' the Words indeed, as render'd by the *Septuagint*, directly import no more than that a wicked Man is sometimes seen persevering, or continuing in his Wickedness, μένων ἐν κακίᾳ αὐτοῦ.

But I consider the Text according to the common Acceptation, and proceed to shew, Lastly, What we are to understand by a wicked Man's prolonging his Life, in his Wickedness. And the Words may either import, that a wicked Man is sometimes permitted to enjoy all the proper Accommodations of Life, while he proceeds in a wicked impenitent State; or that he raises his Fortunes directly on the Ruins of his Conscience; and finds his Account, as to the Prospects he may

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have in this World, even from his acting upon wicked Principles. Instances to this Purpose, in all Revolutions founded on *rebellious* Principles have been so common and notorious, 'tis unnecessary to draw Parrallels from the Rebellion which occasion'd this Day's Humiliation.

II. I am to consider in the *Second Place*, with what Restriction these Words of my Text are to be understood. It has been an old Question, why the Blessings and Evils of Life are so promiscuously dispens'd to wicked and good Men? If we look upon this as a Question of *Fact*, it cannot be deny'd, and I shall presently say something in answer to the Force of it. What I would observe by the way is, that *Solomon* is not here speaking of the ordinary and common Events of Life to wicked and good Men, but of what happens to them in particular and uncommon Cases. *There is a just Man*, as if he had said, there is here and there for good and wise Ends of Providence an Example of what I am going to observe; in the ordinary Course of Providence the very *Reverse* of the Observation is more generally true; *there are just Men, who prolong* their Lives in their Righteousness, and there are wicked Men, *who perish* in their Wickedness.

A little Experience of the World may convince us of both these Truths; we sometimes see Men of strict and known Probity, enjoying the chief Advantages, and in the most considerable Stations of Life; and attended with a surprising Felicity in all their Designs and Undertakings. We see others of the same Character, tho' for a while expos'd to many Difficulties and Disappointments, and to the worst kind of Treatment, that of *Calumny* and *Reproach*, yet improving what was design'd to impair their
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Credit with the Prince or People, to an occasion of raising it still *higher* and *higher* with both: So that instead of the Disgrace contriv'd for them, they have receiv'd a more publick and honorary Attestation of their good Services; and in proportion, as they have been attack'd by the Violence and Injustice of their Enemies, have discover'd how much they have really merited the Applause and Esteem of their Friends, and of all good Men.

At other Times, the just Man is, not only attack'd in that which is, and ought to be, above all Things dear to him in this World, his *good Name*; but artful Schemes are laid, and sedulously pursued for his Ruin; or if they should happen to miscarry, he is perhaps assaulted with more open Outrage and Force. Yet Providence still defends him from unseen Machinations and visible Dangers, and frequently makes those very Methods, which were intended to crush and destroy him, the Occasion of his future Rise and Grandeur.

Sacred History affords us a memorable Example of this, without mentioning any other, in the Person of *Mordecai*. This illustrious Protector of the Jewish Church and People, from a personal Distaste to him, and because he had too great a Soul to stoop to any little or unjust Condescensions, was destin'd to fall a Sacrifice to a haughty and ambitious Favourite; but whose Revenge indeed had this extraordinary in it, that he resolv'd to involve all the Jews in one common Ruin with *Mordecai*; and that too upon a Pretence of *publick Service*, a stale Artifice of Men in Power to cover the Injustice of their *private Views*.

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But as near as *Haman's* Design was brought in all human Appearance to bear, the Event shew'd that God *can*, and *does*, when he thinks fit, interpose after a special Manner towards the Deliverance of good Men, whom he intends to make the great *Instruments* of his Providence to any Church or Nation.

What has been said, both concerning the Calumnies and Dangers, Men of Probity in the course of their Lives are often exposed to, is very agreeable to what *Solomon* in another Place observes, that *a just Man falleth seven times and riseth up again*, Prov. 24. 16. And I the rather mention this Text, because it is one, among some others, which through Weakness or Design has been brought out of the holy Scriptures to favour *Corruption*. Nay the more to excuse the Sins and Impieties People are guilty of, Additions are made to this Text, and it is said, the just Man *himself* falleth seven times *in a Day*; whereas the Words do not at all relate to a just Man's falling into Sin, but into several Misfortunes out of which notwithstanding God, in his due time, delivers him: This is evident both from the foregoing Verse, and the Opposition in the latter Part of this. *But the wicked shall fall into Mischief.*

For there are also, what I would observe in the next Place, wicked Men, that *perish* in their *Wickedness*.

The Projects of ill Men in Power (for the Nature of my Subject leads me all along to have a more special Regard to publick Characters) very often prove abortive, and finally terminate in their own Ruin or Disgrace; at other times, tho' great and notorious Offenders are more successful, and have committed for a Revolution of some Years the highest Acts of Injustice, not only

ly with Impunity, but Applause, and under a Pretence of legal Power and Right; yet the Providence of God in the Event cuts them short, and they are made to feel the just Revenges of it, in a way, so much the more conspicuous and exemplary, as they thought themselves by the Advantages of their Power, their Wealth, or Alliances more secure and *unaccountable*.

Thus the Heads of the grand Rebellion were permitted for some Years to succeed in their Designs of subverting the Constitution in Church and State, and until they had subverted them intirely: But at last that Vengeance they had so much despis'd and provok'd, overtook them, and at a time when they thought their unjust Acquisitions upon a sure Establishment, and were saying, in Imitation of the *wise Ladies* attending on *Sisera's* Mother, *Have we not sped? have we not divided the Prey?* Yet even then, by a just Retribution of Providence, their Destruction came upon them, and in the following Words of these Ladies, they found a Reward meet, in a proper Sense, *for the Necks of them, that took the Spoil*, Judg. 5. 30,

Where God does not proceed to bring powerful and prosperous Offenders, who have sinned with a higher hand, to condign Punishment, or to give them up to perish in their Wickedness, but still is pleased to prolong their Days, he often inflicts on them some temporary Punishment or Disgrace. Thus again one of the *Principals* in the Rebellion against our Royal Martyr, and who, after his manner, has wrote *Memoirs* of it; found means upon the Restoration to make his Escape, and retire into a foreign Country; where he liv'd many Years, forming all the ill Designs he was capable of against the Peace and

Interests of his Country; in a *voluntary* Exile indeed, but still preferable to the due Execution of Justice upon him at Home: 'Till at last hoping to find his Account in some Overtures made to him by his Friends at the Revolution, he made an Attempt to come over, with a Tender of his Service, yet without being receiv'd, as he expected, according to the Merit of his Principles.

It were easy, were it necessary, to multiply Instances, in confirmation of what I have been asserting, that the Words of my Text ought to be understood in a limited Sense, and are far from being generally applicable either to wicked or good Men.

But is there then no Difficulty, in accounting for these promiscuous Events of Good and Evil to Mankind, 'tho we should only restrain them to particular and less ordinary Cases? Is it so very easy to solve all the Objections, that may arise from what *Solomon* here observes, both with respect to the Justice and Wisdom of God, to say nothing of the other divine Attributes, in his providential Dispensations?

The Answer to this will lie under my next Head, to which I now proceed, *namely*,

III. That no Article of Impeachment can be drawn from what *Solomon* here observes against a divine Providence.

In the first Place, as to what concerns the Sufferings of just Men, so far as the Justice of Providence is consider'd in them, there is no manner of Difficulty. The best of Men are conscious to themselves, that under the severest Dispensations God punishes them less than their Iniquities deserve; they are Sinners, and for this Reason may be punish'd, and that too with Death, the *Wages of Sin*. But after what manner, or to what
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what degree God should punish them in this World, seems rather indeed a Consideration of Wisdom, than Justice; so that all the Difficulty, if there be any in what is objected, will lie against this Attribute.

And it may appear at the first View to bear a little hard on the Wisdom of Providence, that God should not only expose just Men to the severest Tryals and Adversities, but that too upon the very account of their being just Men. Wisdom consists in employing proper Means towards attaining the propos'd End. One principal End of God's interposing in the Government of the World is to make Men more obedient; but there are no Means of making them so more probable, than by encouraging their Obedience, upon the Prospect of suitable and proper Rewards: And yet we observe, just Men, even from a Principle of Justice, are sometimes brought under a long continu'd Course of Sufferings; and that their very *End* too, in a vulgar way of judging, is *without Honour*.

In answer to this 'tis sufficient to say, That God may have very wise Reasons for afflicting just Men, tho' they do not particularly, and in a full View, appear to us. The more General and Comprehensive the Designs of any Agent are, the more Difficulty there is in making a Judgment concerning the Reasons upon which he ought to proceed. Even in the Conduct of our private Affairs, we are on certain Occasions oblig'd *in Prudence* to take those Measures, which appear imprudent to others.

But we need not have Recourse to this general Answer for vindicating the *Wisdom* of Providence, with respect to the Sufferings of just Men; for we are not speaking of Men so perfectly just
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as to *need no Repentance* ; but of such upon whom their Sufferings may have a good Influence to bring them to Repentance, and at the same time render them more sincerely *Penitent*. I need not proceed to shew, that the Misfortunes incident to good Men are, both in their own Nature, and the Intention of God, *medicinal*, and conducive to these Ends : But the Wisdom of Providence in them is further acquitted, as they are also of good Use and Instruction to others.

When we see a good Man of superior Quality and Distinction in the World, undergoing the greatest Calamities of Life, or perhaps Death it self, with a firm compos'd Resolution, and a Mind perfectly resign'd to God's Will ; this evidently discovers, that Religion has in truth great Power over him ; and at the same time gives us a more conscious Sense, and makes us really ashamed of our own Weakness. Bright and flaming Examples of Christian Fortitude, will naturally animate us with a generous Ambition to *go and do likewise* ; but cannot fail of impressing lively and awakening Apprehensions of our Duty. Great Personages, in a State of Adversity, like the Sun under an Eclipse, have at once more numerous Beholders, and put them upon making more uncommon and useful Reflections.

Tho' to a Christian, who is inspir'd with any becoming Degree of Zeal, when he sees an illustrious Person, or (to turn our Thoughts directly on the Occasion) when he beholds a Sovereign Prince, bearing for a long time innumerable Difficulties and Disappointments, with a Constancy superiour to them, and at last, after having suffer'd all the preparatory Indignities, to a publick Death, and some of which we cannot even with Decency mention ; yet submitting to
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the Stroke of it with a Dignity of Mind, truly Christian and Heroick: This is an Example certainly of much greater Force to *invigorate* the Obedience of such a Christian, than, as the Objection supposes, to *discourage* it. Who, after so brave a Leader, would not be fir'd with a noble Ardour to fill any *Post of Honour*? And such is a State of Adversity to good Men here, which it might please the great Lord and Sovereign of the World to appoint him.

With respect to the Prosperity or Impunity of wicked Men, in any eminent Station of Life, the Difficulties concerning the Justice of Providence are as easily solv'd. The natural Light of their own Minds furnish'd *Seneca* and *Plutarch*, who have both particularly consider'd this Point, with clear and obvious Solutions to it. And indeed, if secular Princes may, upon good Reasons, for a time suspend the Execution of Justice on certain notorious Delinquents, why should we deny this Power to the Fountain of all Power? The World, in a Revolution of some Years, would be in danger of having very few Inhabitants, if all wicked Men were to be punish'd so soon as they might deserve Punishment, and none but just Men suffer'd to live.

But this leads me to consider the Objection, from the powerful and prosperous State of unjust Men in this World, as suppos'd to lie against the Wisdom of Providence. For hereby it may be thought too great and visible Encouragement is given to Sin, as on the other side, was objected Discouragement to Vertue.

But this is further answer'd, upon the Belief of a future State, wherein both Rewards and Punishments shall be dispensed after a more equal manner; and wicked Men, who are more particularly

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ticularly under Consideration, call'd to a severer Account, in proportion to their usurp'd or abus'd Power and Greatness. Yet setting aside the Regards of another Life, *Plutarch* makes use of two Arguments, more peculiarly respecting the State of successful wicked Men in this World, which may deserve a Place here.

One is, That God does not immediately punish wicked Men, because he would give them time to amend; wherein he speaks very agreeably to the Argument of the Apostle, *Rom. 2. 4.* that *the Goodness of God leadeth*; or has a natural and direct Tendency to lead Men to Repentance. This Moralist instances in *Miltiades*, *Cimon*, and *Themistocles*, and observes, that if they had been cut off in the first Disorders and Excursions of Youth, their Country had been depriv'd both of the Liberty, they were the great Instruments of preserving, and a large Accession of that Glory, they had the Happiness of deriving to it.

The other Reason is, That wicked Men in Power and Prosperity, are the proper Instruments of punishing other wicked Men. Thus he observes, *Phalaris* became a Scourge to the *Agri-gentines*, and that the Conquests of *Cesar*, by enabling him to over-awe the Senate, and oppress the Commonwealth, was a just Punishment on the modern Pride and Luxury of the *Romans*. He cites other Examples to this Purpose; and indeed, both sacred and prophane History are full of them. 'Tis the Glory of God in all human Revolutions, to bring Good out of Evil, and to make the very Wickedness of Men employ'd in them, subservient to the great Ends of his Providence.

After all, this Objection, against the Wisdom of Providence, both as it respects wicked and
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good Men, has the less Weight, as it does not proceed upon general Observation, but more particular and uncommon Events, in human Life. Should God always give Prosperity to good Men, and to them only; should all Things go smoothly on with them, and succeed to their Desires; the Question would not then be, whether we should be good and vertuous out of Choice, but we should be determin'd to be so, out of necessary and indispenfable Regard to our temporal Interests.

Should it again be the constant and unchangeable Order of Providence, to blast the Designs of wicked Men, and cause them to perish in their Wickedness, we should be more at a loss to distinguish, whether our Obedience to the Laws of God, might proceed from a filial Awe of offending him, or a more servile Dread of suffering for our Offence. He has therefore so wisely temper'd the Dispensations of his Providence to wicked and good Men, that all Men may be induc'd to love and fear him upon the most noble and generous Motives.

IV. I am now, in the last Place, to make some useful and seasonable Improvements of what has been said.

I. And first I would infer, that we cannot make any certain Judgment in Favour, or to the Disadvantage of other Men, from their outward Condition of Life, or the Success, whether good or bad, that is observ'd to attend them. But we are to consider their intrinsick Qualifications, and the Principles upon which they most evidently appear to act. Men of vulgar Spirits will always be attach'd to Fortune, and judge of personal Merit from the external Splendor, whereby they see People of Distinction surrounded.

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The great Vulgar and the small are apt to run into this corrupt way of Judging; and it would on some Occasions, where we are dazled with the brighter Ideas of Glory and Success, be thought very singular and capricious, even in wise Men, to judge otherwise. But let us, without regard to popular and confus'd Ideas, in estimating the real worth of other Men, set aside as much as we can, all exterior Distinctions, and never pass a decisive Sentence upon them, till the highest Degree of moral Evidence obliges us to give it.

2dly, Tho' 'tis acknowledg'd that God, both for Reasons of Wisdom and Justice, does sometimes suffer just Men to perish, and wicked Men to prolong their Days; all Persons in their several Stations, but above all those in the highest, ought notwithstanding to encourage Vertue, and discountenance Vice. We are not in our Commerce with the World, to govern our selves by the Events of a Providence, the particular Views whereof are many times unknown to us, but by the known Maxims of civil and political Prudence. For instance, because God does sometimes permit good Men in the faithful Discharge of their Duty to be persecuted or oppress'd; we must not therefore argue, that any Person for endeavouring faithfully to serve the Publick, ought to incur a publick Detriment or Disgrace. As Irrational would it be on the other Hand, for Persons in Authority, to place their distinguishing Favours on those, who make it their Business to embarrass or traduce the Administration. A Government will be very ill serv'd upon Principles, which naturally encourage Men to despise it.

28.5.60

One of the wisest Maxims laid down by a Distinction of Men among us, if Distinctions may possibly be kept up under the Reign of so excellent a Princess, and who has taken the most effectual Care to remove all Occasions of them; yet one of the wisest Maxims, I say, of those who affect a Name of Distinction, we ought not to envy them the Credit of, is firmly to support all those, who are in Friendship or Alliance with them, and to run down, as Enemies, all others who stand in their way. Tho' this is a Rule too ignoble, and in truth unchristian to be recommended to Imitation; yet I do not know whether we may not in some respects learn Wisdom from it; or whether on some Occasions, when it ought to have obtain'd the most, it has not been too little consider'd.

3dly, What I would in the last Place leave an Impression of upon your Minds, is, the Advantage, as well as Duty, of strictly pursuing the Paths of Justice. For tho' a just Man may perish, yet God ordinarily prevents him with the Blessings of Life, and in the Distribution of his temporal Favours, sets a more visible Mark of Distinction upon him. And we are not to regulate our Conduct by particular Accidents, but by the most general and ordinary Event of Things.

Tho' that excellent Prince, whose Martyrdom we are now met to commemorate, suffer'd both as a Christian, for adhering to his Religion; and as a Prince for asserting, to the last, the just Rights of the Crown, and Liberties of the People; which none, but Enemies to both, can think of dividing: Yet, in the usual Course of Providence, good Princes may most piously hope to succeed; and if we consult our own Histories in particular, have been most happy and successful;

ful; tho' it may be question'd whether we can exemplify this Observation to so great Advantage, in the whole Line of our Kings, as by mentioning two of our Illustrious Queens. The former of which was not more instrumental in perfecting the Reformation of the Church, than the other has been in supporting it. And if the *English* Nation was considerable in its Influence and Weight abroad, and in its domestick Wealth and Splendor under the Reign of Queen *Elizabeth*, the Glory of it in these and other Respects, without derogating from the Memory of that excellent Princess, will be allow'd much superior under the Ascendant of Queen *ANNE*.

Yet I do not hereby intend, but that an Obligation also lies upon all Orders and Degrees of Men, to practise the Rules of strict Justice; even from the natural Tendency of it, to their present Happiness. And indeed it is evident from *Solomon* himself, that the Words of my Text are not to be consider'd as an Observation arising from the common and ordinary Event of Things, but are rather an Exception to what he lays down as most agreeable to the usual Methods of Providence in the two foregoing Verses; where-with I shall therefore conclude.

“ Tho' a Sinner do evil an hundred times,
 “ and his Days be prolong'd, yet surely I know,
 “ *in general*, it shall be well with them that fear
 “ God, and that fear before him.
 “ But it shall not be well with the Wicked,
 “ neither shall he *prolong* his Days, which are as
 “ a Shadow; because he feareth not before God.

F I N I S.